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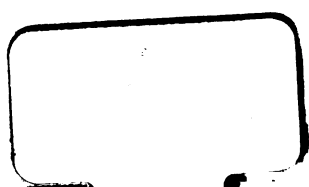
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LEONILDA.

LEONILDA.

A Roman Romance of the Sixteenth Century.

BY

FELIX MELDRED.

ORA CHE NUOVA STORIA E QUESTA?
UN' ANTICHISSIMA STORIA SE
VOLETE, DI AMORE, VENDETTA,
CONSPIRAZIONI. . . .
BASTA! BASTA! AVANTI!

ITALIAN COMEDY.

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PREFACE.

SOME fifteen years since, I found myself in Rome an idle man. Surrounded by art and artists, I took up the brush from sympathy; but the difficulty of representing successfully that which I saw, or that which I thought, convinced me of the want of education or taste, and perhaps both. In all the arts there are a class of men apt to confound a keen appreciation for a power of producing. Such was my condition. To be convinced of an error is generally very difficult (when we have committed it ourselves); to confess an error, almost painful. Nevertheless, I seldom went out forgetting my sketch-book, which, by the way, I hid as jealously, and looked over as frequently, as a young lady does her first love letter.

One day, whilst strolling in a beautiful garden near Rome, I thought that I might produce pictures with words, if I could not do so with the pencil or the brush. "Why," said I, "should not a man deliberately sit down before an object and endeavour to give the tone, form, and sentiment of that object, as well with the parts of speech as with the parts of colour?" Thus I went on speculating, and thinking I had made a discovery, as if there were no such thing as poetry in the world! But surely we do not write poetry, as painters paint pictures—direct from nature. Poets work more from recollection. They are always telling a dream about what they have seen. I was de-

terminated to try if there was anything to be got out of word-painting, direct from nature. I began with the stump of a tree, a window, a vase ; just as people do when they begin to learn drawing. I found there was much beauty in objects which poets in their pride had neglected ; refused to write about or think about. Many a beautiful pebble is passed over by the hunter for gems. I made many little sketches, which I thought very good. If we did not nurse, and love, and make grow, our early efforts, we should have nothing but infancy in all the arts. Let no man smile at "early efforts ;" they are, perhaps, the most joy-creating of all things in a life dedicated to art. When we have acquired the knowledge of difficulties, we have cut the wings of the mind ; never again will it fly up into high heaven, like the lark, and sing boldly and loudly, full of confidence and hope, believing all the world is delighted to listen ; no, conscious defects will make that mind tremble, and its voice tremble too—feel itself small and even ugly. Self-knowledge is a looking-glass, which, if we were to speak the truth, we are all of us half afraid to look into.

I soon ascertained, beyond form and colour, objects suggested reflection ; then I found my sketches, after a time, accompanied by thoughts which grew out of things. After all, I fancied that this must be a new mode of verse writing ! for, be it known, I found my little attempts ever wandering into rhythm. I fell into a melody of words as unconsciously as winds become musical when they play about a stringed instrument.

I next began to add rhymes to my word-sketches, which gave a pleasing finish, although they created a difficulty. There are very few pictures that do not look better for a frame. Weak and foolish verses are more tolerable when they are musical. If you do not avail yourself of the caps and bells of art, you should possess the attributes of a great sculptor, whose crea-

tions are in themselves so beautiful, that any addition in the way of ornament positively frets the understanding and annoys the eye. I found myself writing, eventually, the Spenserian stanza. I knew this pleasing prison, in which the "Faerie Queene" lives like a gaudy bird in a golden cage, is not without its detractions. The frequent recurrence of the rhyme will sometimes impose a weak line; and dialogue is difficult to work when you have so many periods and corresponding sounds to look after. But all this is perhaps compensated for in the Spenserian stanza by a completeness, dignity, and melody, which must be ever pleasing to the readers of poetry, and which is so admirably suited to descriptive passages, the prominent features in this poem.

I had no idea at the period of my studies that I should ever write a long poem, and solemnly present it to the world. The continual failures of others acted for a long time like friendly warnings. There is nothing under heaven which the world treats with so much silent contempt as indifferent verse. Bad pictures are hung up and looked at; bad music is listened to, and sometimes admired; bad sculpture is good for a garden; but indifferent poetry, what is that good for? The world will forgive many weaknesses, and even crimes, in a man, before it will forgive his silly verses.

Practical people tell you the world cares little about poetry in our days. I cannot believe such assertions, because poetry is being invented and practically used by us all throughout our lives, although we may be ashamed to own the hidden cause of everything which pleases the eye or charms the heart. Men are always writing little poems about the people they love—about nature, about the past and the future. Half the pleasure of life consists in dressing up the events of life in poetry. Some people cannot help writing, and many cannot help printing what others only think about.

A circle of amiable friends, no doubt, frequently become a club of conspirators around a young poet. They are sure to urge him on to some terrible deed of print. To dine with a man whom you know to set up for a poet, and then tell him over the wine that he has entirely mistaken his calling, is something more than one can expect from well-fed human nature generally. Sincerity is as often called rudeness as obstinacy is called firmness. How, then, can one be surprised to find so many well-printed volumes of poetry forgotten by the world? books which in after years will actually make their parents blush. I have heard people regret the printing of their verses, although they are half in love with them still, as some men will be with a jilt. We are full of shuffling excuses when we begin to quarrel with ourselves.

Some authors insist on being at enmity with the world—call it selfish, stupid, unfair—not alive to the beautiful; that is, not alive to *their* beautiful. Such men are too poor, or too mean, to pay for their own folly or weakness. Be sure the world is seldom at fault in the main. There may be circumstances which retard the appreciation of a work of art; but in the long run, if it be good, the world will some day call it good. I do not believe that any really fine poem ever papered a band-box. Disappointed authors will tell you so, and sulk over the paper trunk. Better would it be to look on the matter cheerfully, and confess, like a man, that the poem is useful for keeping the dust from your hat. With everything in this life, if one is to win, a great many must be disappointed. I am afraid a little happiness and a little success costs humanity a great deal of misery and a great deal of failure.

Again, you hear from what are called “practical people,” that railways and steamboats have run down poetry, or taken it off to the frontiers of civilisation. The railway whistle has cer-

tainly frightened away the Dryads, and Fauns, and Fairies; you cannot now-a-days move to tears with any of these heroes, as Dryden, and Collins, and Pope have done. So it is with the classical creations of the Greeks. When you have ceased to believe, you very soon cease to worship. But there is just the same material for poetry in town and country now as of old. Perhaps the great difference after all is, that we now call things by their right names. We can describe a storm without Jove, or a battle without Mars.

It is time to say something about the narrative contained in this poem.

I had made many little poetic studies, when an Italian friend gave me an old manuscript, very clearly written, in very good Italian. There were some Latin notes too, about Beatrice Cenci, and other historical characters. The whole, I fancy, was written by a priest. The book was dated Rome, 1562. The narrative which pleased me most was the biography of a rich priest, in the days of Leo X.—a love story. This priest, whose name is not given, became enamoured of a beautiful girl; of course, he could not marry her. If the church failed in shutting up his heart, it could at least shut up his honesty. The young lady entered a convent, and intended to dedicate her life to prayer. Whilst preparing herself for the fatal vow, she tried to forget her love. But the very act of trying to forget only fanned the flame. True, her mind became more calm in the convent; but then, like still waters, it reflected more. The young priest too, it appears, prayed to all the saints for forgetfulness. But the saint which nature had placed in his bosom got all the sincere offerings. He believed more in the divinity of his heart than in the dogmas of the church. There was a long struggle on both sides, but, like a stage combat, each knew how the fight would end. The young lady left the convent for a love

which was sanctified with everything but the marriage vow. Soon after, Luther's preaching came to the ears of the priest, and although the author of the MS. writes with indignation about the Reformer, he confesses the hero of his narrative was a loud denouncer of church abuses, from his youth, too. He was evidently one of those rebel minds which have ever given so much annoyance to rotten governments and rotten religions: men who tell the mob what they already know, but with such a charm of language, that they become an army, and fight for it. He left Rome, and the mother of his only daughter. Then we have the perils and love-story of the daughter mixed up with the conspiracy to poison the Pope. I will not anticipate this portion of the history, because it forms the narrative of the poem. In case, however, the reader should not be familiar with such event, as narrated in the life of Leo X., I will give the text from Mr. Roscoe, the historian. It runs thus:—

“During the war of Urbino, an alarming conspiracy was discovered at Rome, the object of which was to destroy the Pope by poison; and if the name of religion had not been already sufficiently prostituted, the Christian world might have shuddered to hear that the authors of this crime were found among the members of the Sacred College. The chief instigator of this attempt was the Cardinal Alfonso Petrucci, the brother of Borghese Petrucci, who had lately been deprived of his authority in Sienna, and expelled from that place by the interference of the Pope. This total subversion of the dignity and fortunes of his family, which had been accompanied with the confiscation of his own hereditary revenues, sunk deep into the mind of the Cardinal. He considered the conduct of the Pope in this transaction as in itself highly oppressive and unjust; but when he compared it with the services rendered by his father Pandolfo to the family of the Medici, as well on their restoration to Florence as on other important occasions, and recollected the very active part which he had himself taken, with the rest of the younger cardinals, in raising the Pope to his high dignity, his resentment rose to such a degree as could not be restrained

either by the sense of guilt or the fear of punishment. In the first paroxysms of his anger, he determined to assassinate the Pope with his own hand; but from this he was deterred by the difficulty of effecting his purpose, rather than by the horror of such a crime, or the scandal that must have arisen to the church from the murder of a pope by the hands of a cardinal.¹ Changing, therefore, his means, but not his object, he resolved to destroy the Pope by poison, for which purpose he engaged, as the partner of his guilt, Battista da Vercelli, a celebrated practitioner of surgery at Rome. The manner in which this was to be accomplished was agreed upon.² During the absence of the surgeon who usually attended the Pope, on account of a dangerous and painful complaint with which he had long been afflicted, Battista was introduced to him as a person of superior skill; and if Leo had not, by a fortunate delicacy, and contrary to the entreaties of his attendants, refused to discover his complaint to a stranger, it was intended to have mingled the ingredients of poison in the medicaments to be applied. The impatience of Petrucci could not, however, brook delay, but frequently and involuntarily burst forth in complaints against the ingratitude of the Pontiff, and in expressions of enmity and revenge. This conduct soon attracted notice, and Petrucci, being aware of the danger which he had incurred by his imprudence, thought it expedient to retire for a short time from Rome. He did not, however, relinquish his project, which he had communicated to his secretary, Antonio Nino, who was to accelerate its execution in his absence, and with whom he maintained a frequent interchange of letters. Some of these being intercepted, sufficiently disclosed the criminal nature of the correspondence; and Leo, under the pretext of consulting with Petrucci on the arrangement of his family concerns, required his presence in Rome. Conscious of his guilt, Petrucci manifested some reluctance in complying with this request, but Leo removed his apprehensions by granting him a safe-conduct, at the same time undertaking, by his solemn promise to the Spanish ambassador, not to violate his own act. Confiding in assurances so solemnly sanctioned, Petrucci instantly repaired to Rome. On his arrival he was introduced, in company with the Cardinal Bandinello de' Sauli, into the chamber of the Pope, where they were both secured by the guards, and committed prisoners to the castle of S. Angelo. Against these

Guicciard. lib. xiii.

² p. 115. Jovii, Vita Leon. X. lib. iv.

proceedings the Spanish ambassador loudly remonstrated, asserting, that as he had pledged his faith for the safety of Petrucci, it must be considered as the engagement of his sovereign.¹ Leo was not wanting in arguments to justify his conduct. He alleged in reply, that no instrument of safe-conduct, however full and explicit, could be allowed to avail a person who had conspired against the life of the Supreme Pontiff, unless the crime was therein expressly mentioned. He contended that the same rule was applicable to the crime of murder by poison; a species of guilt abhorred by all laws, human and divine. By evasions of this nature, the Pontiff did not scruple to violate that good faith, of which he ought to have been the first person to set an example, and condescended to use against his adversary the same treachery which had been employed against himself. The measures thus adopted Leo communicated by official letters to the other European potentates, well knowing that great interest would be made by the cardinals to screen their offending brethren from a punishment which would reflect disgrace on the whole college.²

"The surgeon Battista, who had retired to Florence, was soon afterwards apprehended and sent to Rome. Another person named Pocointesta, who had long served the family of Petrucci in a military capacity, was also taken into custody; and the delinquents were rigorously examined by the procurator-fiscal, Mario Perusco. From the confessions of these wretched men, the guilt of Petrucci was apparent, and there was also great reason to suspect, that not only the Cardinal de' Sauli, but several other members of the college, had been privy to his designs. Leo, therefore, resolved to call a meeting of the cardinals in full consistory, to inform them of the reasons of his conduct, and to obtain, if possible, a public confession from such of them as he suspected to be implicated in the crime.

"Before the day for this assembly, which had been fixed for the twenty-second of May, Leo became so greatly alarmed at the extent to which the conspiracy had been carried among the cardinals, that he durst not trust himself in the midst of them. He determined, however, to secure the person of Raffaello Riario, Cardinal of S. Giorgio, who since the time of the memorable conspiracy of the Pazzi, in which he had acted a principal, though perhaps an in-

¹ Guicciard. lib. xiii. vol. ii. p. 145.

² The Letter of Leo to Henry VIII. is given in Reymers, vi. par. 1, p. 134.

voluntary part, had now sat in the college nearly forty years, and from his great wealth and splendid manner of life, was considered as the principal person in the college. The particulars of his arrest, and of the dismissal of the other cardinals from the consistory, are minutely related by Paris de Grassis, and may give a sufficient idea of the personal conduct of the Pontiff on this trying occasion.¹ 'The consistory being assembled, the Pope sent for the Cardinal of Ancona, who continued with him about an hour. As we were surprised at this long interview,' says this vigilant master of the ceremonies, 'I looked through an opening of the door, and perceived in the chamber of the Pope the captain of the palace, and two of the guards under arms. I was apprehensive of some untoward circumstance; but I remained silent. Seeing, however, the Cardinals of S. Georgio and Farnese enter the Pope's chamber with great cheerfulness, I concluded that the Pope had called them to consult with him respecting a promotion of cardinals, of which he had spoken in the morning; but scarcely had the Cardinal S. Georgio entered, than the Pope, who commonly walked very deliberately between two of his chamberlains, hastened out of the room with great precipitation, and, shutting the door, left the Cardinal S. Georgio with the guards. Greatly astonished at his haste, I inquired from the Pope the reason of it, and asked whether he meant to enter the consistory without his stole. We arrayed him with the stole. He was pale and much agitated. He then ordered me, in a more positive tone than usual, to send all the cardinals from the consistory, and afterwards, with a still louder voice, to shut up the consistorial chamber. I obeyed; and no longer entertained a doubt that the Cardinal S. Georgio was arrested. The other attendants and myself then began to form conjectures as to the cause of these proceedings; but the Pope soon afterwards explained them himself, by informing us that the two cardinals in prison had declared that Cardinal S. Georgio was their accomplice; that they had agreed to poison the Pope, and nominate that cardinal as his successor. We could scarcely believe that the Cardinal S. Georgio, whose prudence and abilities were so well known, could have engaged in such a plot; or, if he had been guilty, that he would not have made his escape. We were therefore inclined to think that this accusation was made by the Pope as a pretext to revenge himself for former

¹ Notices des MSS. du Roi, tom. ii. p. 599. Par. 1789.

injuries. However this may be, all that the other cardinals could obtain was, that he should not be sent to the castle of S. Angelo; but should remain under arrest at the palace. A few days afterwards he was, however, ordered into closer custody.'

"On the eighth day of June the Pope again assembled the Cardinals; and after bitterly complaining that his life should have been so cruelly and insidiously attempted, by those who, having been raised to such high dignity, and who, being the principal members of the apostolic see, were bound beyond all others to defend him; and after lamenting that the kindness and liberality which he had uniformly shown to every individual of the Sacred College, even to a degree which had been imputed to him as a weakness, had met with so ungrateful a return,¹ he proceeded to inform them that two others of their members were concerned in the conspiracy, and called upon the guilty to make their peace by a prompt confession, threatening that otherwise he would immediately order them into custody. By the advice of three of the cardinals, Remolini, Accolti, and Farnese,² each cardinal was called upon to answer, on oath, the interrogatory whether they were guilty. When the question was put to Francesco Soderini, cardinal of Volterra, he denied the fact; but upon further admonition he fell prostrate, and with many tears acknowledged his offence, yielding his life to the discretion of the Pontiff. Leo then observed, that there was yet another concealed traitor, when the three Cardinals before mentioned, turning to Adrian di Corneto, Cardinal of S. Crisogono, advised him in like manner to humble himself. With great reluctance he too confessed his guilt. It was then determined that the penitent Cardinals, after paying a heavy fine, should be restored to favour. This fine was settled at twenty-five thousand ducats;³ but when they had raised that sum by joint contributions, Leo insisted that it was intended they should each pay that amount, whereupon they availed themselves of the earliest opportunity to effect their escape from the city. The Cardinal of Volterra retired to Fondi, where he remained under the protection of Prospero Colonna, until the death of the Pontiff; but what became of Adrian is wholly unknown, no tidings having been received of him after his flight from Rome.

"The painful task of punishing the authors and principal pro-

¹ Guicciard. lib. xiii. vol. ii. p. 145.

² Fabron. p. 116.

³ Par. de Grassia. Guicciard. lib. xiii.

moters of this conspiracy yet remained, and seems to have affected the Pontiff with real concern. Of the guilt of the Cardinals Petrucci and de' Sauli no doubt was entertained; yet the conduct of the latter excited general surprise; as he had shared in an eminent degree the favour and liberality of the Pontiff, which he had secured by the elegance of his manners and conversation, insomuch as to have been the frequent companion of the Pontiff in his hours of leisure and relaxation. It was, however, conjectured, that the prosperity which he thus enjoyed, had only served to excite in him those ambitious expectations which no reasonable kindness could gratify, and that he resented the preference shown by the Pope to the Cardinal Giulio, in conferring upon him the episcopal see of Marseilles.¹ Whatever was the cause of his animosity, it was sufficiently apparent, as well from written documents, as the evidence of the surgeon Battista, that he had taken an active part in the machinations of Petrucci, and had supplied him with money for carrying them into effect. During his examination he is said to have hesitated, trembled, contradicted himself, and given evident symptoms of his guilt; whilst Petrucci, almost frantic with rage, poured out his execrations against the Pontiff: but little reliance is to be placed on the conduct of persons examined under the immediate terrors of the rack, where hardened intrepidity may be mistaken for innocence, and the natural dread of corporal sufferings for the struggling of conscious guilt.

"On the day of Pentecost, Leo, having again assembled the Cardinals, addressed them in a long and pathetic oration, in which he intimated, that although he might legally and properly have proceeded to degrade and punish the guilty, yet he had determined to pardon them. The Cardinals present acknowledged his clemency towards their offending brethren, whereupon Leo was melted into tears. He then went to attend the celebration of mass, after which his dispositions and intentions seemed to be astonishingly changed, and it was thought that he had been instigated to convert the punishment of the offenders into a source of gain. On the twentieth day of June he proceeded to degrade the Cardinals Petrucci and de' Sauli, and also the Cardinal Riario, from their dignities, and to deprive them of their goods and ecclesiastical preferments; after which, to the terror and astonishment of all the members of the

¹ Jovii, Vita Leon. X. lib. iv. p. 76. Fabron. Vita Leon. X. p. 119.

Sacred College, he delivered them over to the secular power. During this meeting of the Consistory, which continued thirteen hours, great dissensions and tumults arose, as well between the Pope and some of the Cardinals, as among the Cardinals themselves, of whom only twelve were present, being all who then remained in the city. The sentence of deprivation was read by Pietro Bembo.¹ On the following night Petrucci was strangled in prison. The subordinate instruments of this treachery, Battista da Vercelli and Antonio Nino, were also sentenced to death, and after suffering excruciating torments, were finally strangled, and their bodies quartered.² The life of the Cardinal de' Sauli was spared on the entreaty of Francesco Cibó, the brother-in-law of the Pontiff; and although he was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, yet he was soon afterwards liberated on payment of a sum of money, and making an humble submission, which the Pope received in a most ungracious manner, and answered by a severe remonstrance. As the Cardinal died in the ensuing year, it was insinuated that he perished by a slow poison administered to him whilst in custody, by the order of the Pontiff; an accusation which has no foundation but in the horrible frequency with which crimes of this nature were then resorted to, and in the idea, that as the Pope had always treated the Cardinal with distinguished kindness, he could not forgive the injury meditated against him. The Cardinal of S. Georgio experienced greater lenity; and although he had been included in the decree of deprivation, was, on the payment of a certain sum, and without any apology, immediately restored to all his ecclesiastical functions, except the power of voting in the College; which incapacity was also removed before the expiration of a year. On the reconciliation between them, Leo used expressions of particular kindness and respect; solemnly assuring him, that whatever offences the Cardinal had committed against him, he had wholly pardoned and obliterated from his mind. Riario, however, either humiliated by this transaction, or not confiding in the assurances of the Pontiff, soon afterwards quitted the city of Rome, where he had so long resided in the greatest splendour and respectability, and took up his residence at Naples, where he terminated his days in the month of July, 1520.

“ This extraordinary transaction, in which so great a proportion of

¹ Fabron. *Vita Leon. X.* p. 120.

² Jov. *Vita Leon. X. lib. iv.* p. 78.

the members of the Sacred College conspired against the life of the Supreme Pontiff, gave rise to much discussion and great diversity of opinion. The motives of Petrucci were indeed sufficiently obvious, and his guilt was universally admitted ; but the reasons which actuated the other Cardinals, who were regarded as his confederates, are not so apparent, and it is highly probable that the crime of some of them merely consisted in their not having revealed to the Pope those expressions of resentment which Petrucci had uttered in their presence. By some it was supposed that the Duke of Urbino, who had already attempted by his letters to interest the College of Cardinals in his favour, had prevailed on a part of its members to engage in this hazardous attempt ; whilst others did not hesitate to represent it as merely a contrivance of the Pontiff to extort large sums of money from the richer cardinals ; but to the last supposition the confession of several of the delinquents in open consistory is a sufficient answer. Upon strict grounds of positive law, the execution of Petrucci may perhaps be justified ; almost all countries having concurred in punishing a projected attempt against the life of the sovereign, in the same manner as if the crime had been actually committed ; but the shameful violation of every principle of humanity exemplified in the execution of the subordinate instruments of his guilt, can never be sufficiently execrated. Are such punishments intended as a retribution for the crime ? Justice then degenerates into revenge. Are they for the purpose of deterring others from like offences ? Care should then be taken not to render the offenders objects of compassion, and to prevent that re-action of opinion which loses the guilt of the criminal in the cruelty of the judge. Are they intended to correct the excesses and to improve the morals of the people ? How can this be effected by spectacles that outrage humanity, and which, by their repetition, steel the heart against all those sentiments by which the individual and general safety of mankind are secured, much more effectually than by gibbets and halters, racks and chains."

With such historical material, I determined to write a poem, and work up my sketches in words. Here my literary troubles began, and here, too, commenced my literary pleasures. I was living in the country where the events of my song occurred : the same sky—the same city—the same people—the same

nature—the same art around me. Like most who write verses, I often contemplated burning everything I had written, and like most who write verses, did not do so. It is difficult to be wise with one's own vanity.

The age of Leo X. appeared to me to be very admirable ground to work on. Its historical events are of a world-wide interest. Poets, painters, and sculptors, of the very highest order, were then giving their inspirations to the world. There was new mind afloat on the old tide. Much that was produced in Leo's day is as alive now as then. Ariosto, Raffaello, Michael Angelo—classical literature routed up, art and science patronised and made respectable. All this never to be lost again! Time may dig many years before he can bury the really beautiful—rubbish buries itself. Luther was giving a new direction to the human mind, and the invention of printing was making never-ending marriages between men's thoughts. Henceforward nothing worth losing would be lost either by land or by sea. All the old hiding-places of literature were broken up by this new silent police. Death took nothing but beggars to the grave. The world has been growing richer ever since—richer, wiser, happier. The ghosts of ancient authors must have wept with jealousy when they saw this new order of things, and unrolled in vain a lost papyrus in that ghost world, which, we are bound to believe, has no printing press. This new medium provided for the new mind, dates, as I take it, a new revolution, before which all other revolutions are but domestic episodes.

Another great and interesting feature of the age of Leo X. is the discovery of America. The events which have grown out of this event, are already giving a new direction to the interests of the whole human race. In truth, the more I contemplated the subject and the period of the drama, the more I felt confident that its failure could only arise in the execution;

in a want of power and art in representing the pictures which the subject suggested, and the sentiments it inspired. I confess to much disappointment in the execution. There are weak lines which I could not get rid of; and in the dialogue passages I found it difficult to maintain the music of the verse. With such confessions, the author introduces himself to the few who care to read a romance in verse.

PARIS, July, 1857.

LEONILDA.

LEONILDA.

PART I.

I.

// 'Twas a broad garden of Italia's South,
Where human hands had guided Nature's will
Into green fancies—where from stony mouth
Of grotesque fountain, in the noon-day still
Of sunlight, you might hear cool waters till
They charmed the faintness from your brow away ;
Fretting the silence which they could not fill,
With the low babble of a glitt'ring spray
That starr'd with living gems the blue, o'er-hanging day.

II.

About this garden scene were clust'ring trees,
Prisoning a pleasant twilight in the grove
That vista'd into gloom, 'neath leafy frieze,
Entangling like a gothic arch above.
No human step could here be heard to move ;
The mossy pathway muffled wand'ring feet—
The busy winds grew mute as maiden's love,
Or feared to breathe in such a calm retreat,
Where you might think to hear the heart of Nature beat.

//

III.

The broken column of an earlier age,
And statue such as woke divinity
In History's yesterday—ere turned that page
Which calls the past a lie, itself to be—
Watched in this wilderness, their majesty
And stony quiet suiting well the scene.—
Here tablet seats of marble you might see
'Neath the cool shade of fresh acacias green,
Through which the light in drops fell with a spatt'ring sheen.

IV.

One spot there was—one charmed retreat, and there
Wild flow'rs and fruits grew with a wild excess,
Hanging their odours on the virgin air,
That came to rob, yet linger'd to caress,
As worked the bee her naked arms to dress,
Till wealth hung round her like a rich man's chain ;
Here butterflies their sunny love would bless
With fluttering kiss, and then divide again
For where a flower might couch, but could not long detain.

V.

// 'Twas here at noon, when summer's ripening light
Paused, like a pallid thinking hour of day,
O'er matted roofing, in whose mimic night—
Mute joy it was—a sleeping maiden lay :
Her tresses from her forehead thrown away,
Her bodice all unjewell'd, so the air
With cooling sigh about her form might play—
Paling that blush which sometimes dreams will wear
When first the heart begins its fondness to declare.

VI.

Mute joy it was !—her bosom's gentle strife
Slowly upheaving with a measured beat
Like breathing wave ; but not a trace of life
Moved her grouped limbs, which you beheld repeat
Themselves through gauzy robe, yet incomplete
As vision wand'ring through a cloud of thought.
One arm fell low as were her nestled feet,
The other circling round her brow was brought,
And braceleted with hair that flashed the light it caught.

VII.

The twined roof of flowers where she lay
Threw on her white-robed form a glowing hue ;
As gaudy casement paints the light of day
With the rich heraldry the hour streams through.
But here the painted pomp of nature grew—
The rose that blushed and could not pale again ;
With many-coloured blossoms—pink and blue,
Shut out the sun, and, like heraldic pane,
Made eloquent the light with rainbow-tinted stain.

VIII.

What thoughts now pace the chambers of her mind,
But fail to quicken words ? The dream-wrought hour
Keeps all in its own jealous silence shrined.
Wake up ! Wake up ! our senses haunt thy bower
With aching anxiousness. What popped power
Thus charms thy noon to night ? that slumbers deep
Should bury at its birth a mind's rich dower !—
Yet, like a gem o'er which clear waters creep,
Thy trembling soul, all light, floats on the waves of sleep.

IX.

But who draws near from yonder myrtle grove,
Spotted with golden orange full and round,
Ripening in light that clasps the scene with love
As here the very lip of earth were found?
Onward he comes, listening each leafy sound
With beating heart.—He seeks the sleeping maid.
How charmed that sleep! Like Sculpture that has bound
You in its beauty, till you feel afraid
Lest it should wake to life and with life's frailty fade.

X.

'Tis VOLPO, he, the Cardinal, so known
For worldly wisdom and the cares of state—
Immutable, whose seventy years had grown
A will that mars the small, but makes the great.
Could such man love? No human heart can date
Undying passion's power. He who stood by
Would with the winter of his life debate—
Thus teach his inward conscience how to tie
Deception round itself and feed deception's sigh.

XI.

“The dream that thou could'st love me is a hope
That sits with folded wings, and fears to learn
From the star-language of its horoscope—
Dear Hope, whose joy-expecting brow should turn
Ever to Future, and from Future earn
New smiles to dimple thy bright face with joy—
How sad thy mockery, when we discern
But that which cheats to-morrow still employ
To-morrow to betray, but never to destroy!

XII.

"I who have lived 'mid men, and proudly seen
My very name chase life-blood from the cheek—
I who, once strong as clasping arch, could lean
On conscious self—alone ask self to speak—
Fooled by this toy of life, a love I seek
My better sense will often blush to wear.
The heart grows at its altar wondrous meek,
For I could supplicate, with constant prayer,
The smile which careless sleep has left to mock me there."

XIII.

Still babbling fell the silver fountain's spray;
Riper the lemon paling in the sun;
Fainter with joy the flowers, as the hot day
Grew older, and his golden arms were flung
About responsive earth, as earth begun
To blush responding to intenser heav'n.
Some men on Nature's breast have never hung:
He heeded not such charms—his wild thoughts riven
Like waves that fear to kiss the shore on which they're driven.

XIV.

"Dream on, dear maid; I would not have thee know
That which sleep's sentinel keeps from thine ear;
Not yet to speech my secret self must grow—
The mob would pity should my love appear—
Gossip will light her lamp e'en with a tear . . .
Oh! there are thoughts which sit at language' gates,
But find no words—such thoughts at times will sear
Men's souls, and make our measurements and dates
Of life hold with dread Death most hideous debates."

XV.

Whilst thus discoursing o'er the sleeping maid,
Two beings bore towards this shady spot ;
Contending argument their steps delayed,
As each untied some tangled wordy knot—
The hesitation of an unripe plot,
When first the mind begins to map the ground.
And when the Lady, in warm speech, forgot
Herself in heightened voice, the Youth—who found
Ever quick answer—halting, sought to hush the sound.

XVI.

A white plume, flaunting from his cap of green,
Fell light as foam falls from an emerald wave ;
Around his throat hung lace which might have been
Wrought from such mazy spider's feet as pave
With toil their frail pavilions,—silken, save
Where velvet-slashed, his body dress was bright,
And girded with a sworded belt, which gave,
Together, all the air of one whose light
And gallant step proclaimed nobility his right.

XVII.

And she who listened to his ardent speech
Wore robes of solemn black, and her pale face—
Womanly e'en to motherhood—might teach
A soul to sympathise with grief whose trace
Sainted her sorrowing brow, its resting-place.
Each linked in conversation, slowly they
A myrtle-shaded, winding pathway pace ;
Hot waxed their converse, and the rapid play
Of question and response grows louder as they stray.

XVIII.

“ Good OSCARO, thou lov’st my daughter well—
In mercy drag thy hidden fears to light ;
Give them plain speech, and bid them boldly tell
‘All they embody—since no prying sight,
Nor curious ear, in this retreat can fright
To falsehood that you seek to tell—no less
I urge to frankness for I would unite
With thine my own benighted thoughts, and press
Our speech until it wear a native hue and dress.”

XIX.

“ Lady, ’tis said how many a wicked deed
Makes up so terrible a tale of crime
In VOLPO’s life, that if quick conscience breed
Her second teeth, he lives now in the prime
And manhood of remorse ; and coming time—
All his new days should wear a sable thought,
And so charged full with tears, and hopes sublime
Follow each other, as those days were nought
But Weepers in a funeral train, with grief o’erwrought.”

XX.

“ Say on—new matter musters in my mind.
Oh ! thou hast tongued old fears until they speak,
And opened eyes which confidence made blind :
We both have found whilst both appeared to seek.
Since we have lit a beacon on the peak
And head of our suspicions, we behold,
From the dark, hiding homes of memory, break
New witnesses—let them speak plain and bold
In Reason’s council-hall, and every fear unfold.”

XXI.

" 'T is but three days ago since first my ear
Learn'd LEONILDA's answer to my 'quest ;
Such moments, Lady, should be made to bear
Expansion like fine gold, and gild the rest
Of our poor life. And as we did unbreast,
Piling our hearts' small troubles in one heap,
She told me, oft the Cardinal addressed
Her with a broken language, such as sleep
At times will give away, and yet pretend to keep.

XXII.

" How, when at times he proffered her to drink
The ruby snow-draught—cold enough to chill
Hot summer's cheek—unconsciously she'd sink
In drowsy reverie—the brain would fill
With visions, such as lord it o'er the will
When Reason's madness in the mind is bred.
Then would faint prayers her helplessness instil—
Such prayers as curtain round a sick one's bed—
Half whisper'd and half wept, and utter'd with pale dread."

XXIII.

" Oh fatal truth ! Look, where yon spreading tree
Paints the white stone with mottled shadowing—
There VOLFO halts—What are we doomed to see ?
My daughter dear—she sleeps—When truth can sting,
How terrible the wound ! " . . . Both wand'ring bring
With cautious step the scene more near to view.
The mother, trembling like a frightened wing,
Flutter'd beside the youth, who quickly drew
A flashing blade—as his whole body wept with dew.

XXIV.

“ Lady, this hour should edge our dull intent.
Do not your eye-balls ache with proof? And now
His arms are 'bout her senseless body bent—
Methinks his lips have dared to near her brow!
Good saints, I pray ye spare a crime! . . . Be thou
Convinced.—He witches her with drugs to sleep!
What have we left? Since it were vain to 'vow
Our ills t' the world's dull ear—vainer to steep
Rome with a scandal that would make our blush more deep.”

XXV.

With rapid step now VOLFO leaves the bow'r,
All joyous that his trembling lips have swept
The blossom of her cheek. No human pow'r
Had stay'd the hand of OSCARO, who crept—
But yet too late—where LEONILDA slept.
Vain destiny!—that ever begging why!
Some moments are the gift, yet some the theft
Of Providence; and yet we blund'ring try
With reason to reveal—with cunning to defy.

XXVI.

He paused—he watched the old man pass from sight—
His vengeance grew divine before it died—
He gazed on heav'n from his own inward night
Of murd'rous thoughts—he felt the warm prayer glide
Like glory from his soul. “I'm spared!” he sighed;
Then hurriedly he joined the lady, who
Had feared to near the scene—then fondly tried
To comfort with persuasive speech, that knew
No pause—but asked—nor waiting, asked anew.

XXVII.

“ Dear Lady, then—I pray thee once again—
Oh ! give consent !—one bloodless means have I—
That we take flight—’twere madness to remain :
Large cities love to batten on a lie,
And scandal will not let a scandal die.
To-morrow night a Priest will wait anear
And bless a love no future shall untie—
Then far from Rome—nay, dearest lady, hear !—
Why pause !—why hesitate ?—and why that gathering tear ?

XXVIII.

“ Oh ! halt not, for our time wears double wings.
Forbear to look on gathering dangers long,
So soon we grow familiar with those things
Which, in their native ugliness, will throng
The mind with healthy horrors, that belong
To and are of themselves. Must I then urge
To wakefulness with deeds that stand among
This bad man’s past ?—deeds that no prayers can purge,
Were they eternal as the moan of ocean’s surge ? ”

XXIX.

“ True, OSCARO—too full of fearful truth.
Yet have I but a woman’s heart at best,
And cannot choose but feel how from my youth
I’ve lodged this man like father in my breast.
Thou dost not yet know all.—Here let us rest,
And I will tell the history of my day,
That thou may’st better know how hard the test,
When you command a bankrupt heart to pay
Its last to the Jew world, which took so much away.”

XXX.

Where LEONILDA lay they each took seat.
The mother spread a kerchief o'er the head
Of the yet slumb'ring maid. The Summer's heat
Had bred the hungry gnat, which, singing, fed
Where most young blood in blushing streamlet shed
Warm life. Again they each withdrew, and strolled
About a tree-screened path, where light seem'd dead,
And yet with open eye, for there the gold
And glory of the day slept pale and speechless cold.

XXXI.

But here and there the green wall of the grove
Opening, discovered a grand scene around—
The arch-built aqueduct that seems to move—
That crawls to gray perspective, although bound
In broken fragments to the thirsty ground ;
The blank, still, blue above, the calm below :
And yet this listening awe of landscape wound
No spell about these two, whose prating flow
Of rapid speech more hot and earnest seemed to grow.

XXXII.

“ Lady ! ” said OSCARO—“ that child—his son !—
That blue-eyed boy, that oft would chase with me
The gadding butterfly—whilst he was young,
Full of his God as early morn, died he.
His father called for the world's mockery—
Remember how he led the child one night
To where a tow'ring rock hangs o'er the sea.—
The brain reels gazing from that dizzy height,
To which no music comes from ocean's lip of light—”

XXXIII.

" 'Tis a sad history—yet there are who live,
And on the mystic tale their doubts bestow—
Who say the child unconsciously did give
His body to the yawning gulf." " We know
The man, and I have little doubt to show
He murdered his own boy. But, Lady dear !
I long to learn what good thou hast to throw
In balance 'gainst this evil life, and hear
Thine own strange past, whilst yet thy daughter sleeps—Draw
near ! "

XXXIV.

" I have a child's remembrance, twined with doubt,
How I was carried to a convent scene,
A world within that mocked the world without ;
As though all time existed but to glean
The dead fruit of a life which stood between
God and this world—unclaimed by earth or heav'n.
There lived I, as the dreary home had been
The wondrous universe to which is given
A power to help the soul to climb from whence 'tis driven.

XXXV.

" Soon as ripe reason and reflection came,
An honour'd Priest proclaimed himself my friend ;
He told me all were dead who bore my name,
And that some blessed destiny would send
A guardian for my life—that I should bend—
(The guardian was himself !) to his mild will.
Oft would he visit me, and bid me lend
A scholar's mind with reverence, and fill
Its niches with such thoughts as are its statues still.

XXXVI.

“ How doubly dear grew life when he was nigh !
Oh ! marvel not—I loved ! and loved so well !
Our passions, born with wings, are sure to fly,
And Reason’s broken chain shows where we fell !
As his endearing, heart-born, dream he’d tell,
How could I choose but be that instrument
Which, breathed on by persuasive breath, will swell,
And speak the very music that is sent
In longing dumbness there, to wake with language blent ?

XXXVII.

“ So did our beings mingle and entwine,
As though two lives could animate one heart ;
And with warm breath, creating and divine,
We vowed our loves. . . . The hour came to depart
The convent home—I felt the choked tear start—
And unlocked feeling, like a rose, dispersed
Its fragrance in a summer’s joy. Apart
From human scan we wander’d, till we durst
Proclaim aloud our bliss, from every bondage burst.

XXXVIII.

“ You might have thought no human foot had been
Where tangling trees, of many a varied leaf,
Massed into purple gloom their noisy green ;
Where wild flowers bloom’d in sweetest unbelief
Of storms ; and where you saw gnarled trunks beneath
Black ivy’s varnished screen—some, dead and bare,
Stood proud apart like majesty in grief.
The forest’s moss, planted by silence there,
Deadened the insect’s hum and wool’d the whispering air.

XXXIX.

" Dear night, that mocked with mute sublimity
 All marriage vows¹—Nature our great high priest
 Blessed and proclaimed that heaven alone should see—
 Arch with o'erhanging blue our marriage feast.
 So we, from every worldly law released,
 At eve would register our vows on high.—
 Soft twilight hours they were, which but increased
 Our feelings to a rapture, whose warm sigh
 Too earthly seemed to live, yet too divine to die.

XL.

" Time pass'd—at length dear LEONILDA's birth
 Gave a world interest to our happiness—
 Then first reflection touched material earth.
 As spreads the bud at midsummer's caress,
 So spread with pride parental tenderness,
 To make a cradle for our new-born joy.
 Slow, worldly cares began their suit to press ;
 And worldly fears intruded to annoy,
 Until life grew more rich, but rich with life's alloy.

XLI.

" Listen, dear youth!—the full tide of content
 Floats poison on its wave ; and we should know
 All happiness is but for periods lent. . . .
 'Twas then a German monk began to sow
 Men's minds with that rebellion that must grow
 And be the living thunder of Alped thought.
 MARCO could find no rest—he burn'd to show
 Himself to LUTHER. Though with danger fraught,
 I bid him listen most to that his conscience taught.

XLII.

“ This crafty Cardinal, whom all Rome fear,
Shared MARCO's confidence. When he withdrew,
VOLPO took charge of me, and her whose year
Asked for support, and, like the young vine, threw
Itself about the nearest help it knew. . . .
But still her sire comes not—still I repeat
The begging why—and each day ask anew ;
So will to-morrow next to-morrow greet—
So Hope turn back to read the impress of her feet.”

XLIII.

“ Think'st thou he lives, and know ye nothing where
He spells his philosophic life away ?”
“ VOIPO alone can tell, and him with pray'r
Oft have I vainly 'portuned to betray
The mystery. There is, you heard me say,
This monk in Germany of mighty mind,
Who holds the throbbing of our present day
Foretells a quickened age—there we might find
Who charms my thinking hour as music charms the blind.”

XLIV.

“ Misfortune ripens friendship into love—
And love grows quicker in the tears of woe
Than in hot happiness and joy. To prove
How much I feel were idle—but to know
More of thy grief-shaped life, and then bestow
My days to soothe this sorrow, is a task
Which cannot choose but from such history grow.
And many weighty questions would I ask,
Did I not fear to wound whilst tearing off the mask.

XLV.

“Oh! rotten world! If jealous Time untombed
All that rests festering in the grave of past,
If jealous Truth her mighty power assumed,
And man met man his double self unmasked—
His deeds unkennelled, and his actions cast
(With secret motives blushing on his face)
Into a searching daylight—then at last
Many, who walk so bland life’s market-place,
Would skulk from where they stand or strut with kingly grace.”

XLVI.

Thus speaking they had left afar the bower,
Lest their discourse should rouse the gentle maid;
Now, deeming she might wake as grew the hour,
Again towards her garden couch they strayed.
Each for the other dreams from future made,
Which lived their little summer in the mind.
Their path still lay along refreshing shades;
The Youth, long meditating, ’gan to find
Words for his plans, and thus his waiting hopes defined:—

XLVII.

“Dear Lady, we’ve enough discussed this man.
Give thy consent—let LEONILDA wed,
And bless with mother’s ‘Yes!’ my only plan—
To-morrow, and Rome’s gossip may be fed
With idle tales; to-morrow—and they’re dead—
The world breeds wonders fast as we can gape!”
The Lady, speechless, paused with downcast head,
The while quick OSCARO espied a fleeting shape
Glide quickly through the trees, as seeking to escape.

XLVIII.

List! list! her wandering feet—she comes!—why fear?
Yon myrtle hedge one moment balks his sight—
'Tis but the dead leaf's rustle that we hear!
It may be winds—or that some stem, too slight,
Hath dropped its fruity weight! How faint—how light,
A cause makes love in expectation sigh,
When love asks but for moments to unite!
Vain fears! She comes! her lips with words untie—
The rose will shut in grief where she stands blushing by.

XLIX.

And never youth met youth with joy like this,
For each would interchange, like prodigals,
The precious coinage of that heart-born bliss
Which makes life full of treasure where it falls.
Soon fluttering speech to burning language calls
Hopes that before were blushes, languageless;
No choking doubt their tide of love enthrals,
No fear takes captive feeling's fond caress,
As soul meets soul unmasked, and meeting meets to bless.

NOTE TO PART I.

STANZA XXXIX., PAGE 18.

*Dear night, that mocked with mute sublimity
All marriage vows.*

The love story of Leonilda's mother may at first sight assume a painful aspect in the eyes of the English reader, who does not reflect on the causes which produce such alliances. But a love like this in Italy is frequently accompanied with the most holy ties of affection, and the most pure domestic happiness. If alliances thus contracted be a crime, the Roman Church is to blame. Leigh Hunt, in his "Lives of Italian Poets," very truly observes : — "This is one of the falsehoods which the Roman Catholic religion thinks itself warranted in tempting honest men to fall into, thus perplexing their faith at the very root of all faith, and tending to maintain a sensual hypocrisy, which can do no good to the strongest minds and must terribly injure the weak."

PART II.

THE voiceful crowd—the city's busy life,
Once more with Sleep's returning boon is blest,
And silence mocks the Forum's fretful strife.
Now Night, like dusky Indian mother's breast,
Pillows the world, her slumb'ring child, to rest.
Grief-killing hour! how many a fretful care
In its own native nothingness is dressed!
Sleep, the true satire on the life we wear,
Writing all a mind's weals and woes in viewless air!

The daylight's kiss still warms the soft wind's sigh,
Although the moon has reached her pausing height,
And spreads a pensive stillness o'er the sky—
Clear e'en to day—that blue of southern night,
In which lone stars most love to throb their light.
Such midnight, as with dream of sunbeams fraught,
Sublimes our nature, and makes strong our sight;
Until the soul, with its own joy o'er-wrought,
Swoons in a Maker's works, and faints with wordless thought.

III.

Below the ruins of an Empire's pride
 Make proud the dust with Caesar'd glory wed ;
 Rome cannot bury Rome, though time may hide
 Her broken temples in a vulgar bed.
 Still you may trace the arch triumphant spread—
 Still many a column stands, like sculptured sigh,
 To mourn the altar of a faith that's dead ;
 Something immortal yet seems hov'ring nigh,
 For Gods will look divine, though pass'd into a lie.

IV.

But turn we to a later date, when Rome
 With voice of thunder hush'd the world to awe,
 And with the echo of her cross-crowned dome
 Proclaimed a peace—as oft commanded war.
 Rome in her second birth had power to draw
 Around her nations kneeling to her will !
 Her smile or frown again were strong as law ;
 And, like an army that's retreating, still
 Her faint artillery's heard, but has no power to kill !

V.

No crime too great, no folly too absurd,
 When Faith has sanctified the cunning lie ;
 The million love to marvel—love to herd
 In warring mobs, prepared to fight—to die—
 And martyrdom misname a butchery.
 The crafty few—the weak—the bending mind—
 The many who believe, they know not why—
 Self-cheats, and they whom idleness makes blind—
 Of such the world's made up—to such is man inclined.

VI.

If this be poor humanity—alas !
 We need not wonder, though, perchance, may weep,
 To know Truth's Heroes fail to teach the mass.
 Scorned, hated, feared—they only live to reap
 The world's contumely. But from the deep
 Of those immortal souls, the listening few
 Drink dreams divine—e'en from that hero-sleep ;
 And sistered thought in sistered minds renew
 On Time's broad battle-field the struggle for THE TRUE !¹

VII.

Our story's homed in the all-meaning years
 Of the MEDICIAN LEO's mental light !
 There in the mist of shadowy Past appears
 That monument—"To Death of Darkness' night !"
 The path that knowledge seeks, from thence grows bright—
 Our footsteps write God's love from such dear past—
 Guesses at truth grow vital and unite—
 Then a world's grave was gaping—ages cast
 Themselves into the tomb, and looked o'er earth their last.

VIII.

There was a mighty movement in men's minds ;
 Tho' paralyzed the limb, the Will was there—
 That Will that waits till accident unbinds—
 Uprose the man—then uprose everywhere
 Battalioned reason—lo ! the trick's laid bare !
 Tho' all the juggling crew of Rome combine,
 With smiles to cheat, or dungeon link to scare,
 That early Christian faith, that light divine,
 LUTHER again unlocked, and bade men's hearts enshrine.

IX.

The tyrant trembles on his worldly throne ;
 Imposture flies, but knows not where to hide ;
 And many a false heart finds itself alone,
 Dreading the most what erst had been its pride.
 Hypocrisy, so long the Churchman's bride,
 With painted cheek yet played the harlot's game ;
 But yet there were who every art defied—
 Who dared to think, and, thinking, dared proclaim
 The Church-coined falsehood's coin, ay, with the Saviour's name !

X.

Date we from hence the growth of human mind,
 Each year half opening some mysterious gate,
 Which shows so much we almost fear to find !
 Hear we not struggling infancy relate
 The alphabet of Knowledge, far too great
 To grow to Language ? yet, 't is prophecy,
 And shows Creation working to create
 In waiting man some undreamed destiny ;
 May we not now but in the womb of Nature lie ?

XI.

The chains, craft-forged, that held the human race,
 Have woo'd at length the mighty lightning-stroke,
 That severed them in twain, and gave new space
 To reasoning mind, which, once from bondage broke—
 Once from long torpor and disease awoke—
 Must show its aim divine, and slowly grow
 The symbol of the Word the Saviour spoke—²
 Our strife-torn world lives on, itself to know ;
 Behold what Past called " Hopes " to wondrous being flow !

XII.

Men greeted then the age's dearest boon.
What made men's minds immortal? 'T was the PRESS!
That blessed the world so late, yet grew so soon
Omnipotent; and with her first address
Gave a republic to mankind, not less
Eternal than divine—winging God's word;
Which Time nor Space no longer could repress.
The winds had swept the waters, and had stirr'd,
With many-lippéd legions, music long deferred.

XIII.

LEO's rife reign dawned like a summer's day,
Whose blush could never to Death's night belong;
Bathed with the melody of Poet's lay,
And coloured with immortal Poet's song.
RAPHAEL was one of this immortal throng,
Painting the portrait of expiring creed—
Henceforward saints of art, if not among
The altars of a faith, his pictures read,
Live with that light of soul which earth-born beings need.

XIV.

And ANGELO, who wrought from shapeless stone
The giant fancies of his muscled mind!
His grand imagination stands alone,
In its own majesty and might enshrined.
There in his fleshy marble you may find
Thought turned to stone; and on his painted wall
Pictures that will not let Time's eye grow blind:
Sublime—impressive—with a charm to call
The mind to worship, and a grandeur to appal.

XV.

'T was from this date man's history took new aim.
 COLUMBUS near the ocean lay asleep!
 A vision dawn'd, which growing, soon became
 The Altar where his hopes would vigil keep.
 Then Andes, rising from the gladdened deep,
 With cloud-wreathed brow and silver-sandal'd feet,
 Like a ghost-world athwart his brain would creep—
 Then too he'd dream th' Atlantic hush'd to greet—
 To feel upon her mother-breast an infant fleet.

XVI.

The busy winds wake early from their rest—
 A restless crew the chafing sails release—
 Proudly the canvas swells as giants' breast—
 The good ships plough the short, crisp waves in peace.
 On—on! The hills in distant gray decrease,
 Until they seem like fixed clouds. Farewell!
 Farewell! 'T is night! Yon stars can never cease
 To shine above; and they alone could tell
 How each man crept to God as darkness round him fell!

XVII.

Anon the purple of the gathering cloud—
 The war of wind and wave—the thunder-crash,
 Which in long distance, mutt'ring, dies aloud—
 The black mass opening to the lighting flash—
 Each, all that tempest's goading will could lash—
 Split in live fury round the battling crew.
 Still on they went. At length the gurgling splash
 Of summer seas their soothing hymns renew—
 Above no prating clouds disturb the thinking blue.

XVIII.


But yet more terrible than tempest's breath—
More awful and more fraught with anxious fear—
Was that dead calm when nature feigned a death.
The deep sea locked like crystal, and so clear,
The crew beheld through fathoms deep appear
Bright flashing myriads in their arrowy flight.
The ship seem'd rotting in a golden drear
Of sunshine ; and her asking sails of white
Made men breathe fast and full at such a breathless sight.

XIX.

An awful silence wrought upon the brain,
And tongues grew thirsty with the fear of thirst,
And limbs ached with that wearying prison-pain
Contracted space creates. Some men rehearsed
How they could die—some hearts their fondness nursed—
Some thoughts went home, and paused, and loved, and wept.
Still nature's trance endured ! At length a first
Faint breath athwart the oily waters crept ;
The answering sails flapped life, and on the good ship swept.

XX.

When will to-morrow show the promised land ?
Alone upon the waves ! Oh ! tell us where ?
Hope folded oft her wings, and yet oft fann'd
With burning breath the ashes of despair.
Day follows day, but only dawns to bare
That watery waste the heart grows sad to meet.
Soon rebel tongues their fears aloud declare,
Until afar—great God ! the land they greet !
And joy began to tingle in their conscious feet.



XXI.

Like purple gems, they saw an isle unfold
Its sparkling wealth. Around, the sunlit wave
Broke on a fairy shore, in crumbling gold.
There unknown flowers and fruits sweet odours gave,
And clustered round the entrance of a cave,
All musical with birds of beauteous hue.
'T was whilst the day from ocean asked his grave,
A dying flood of light its glory threw,
And earth, and sea, and sky blushed wondrous vermil hue.

XXII.

But most who saw this mighty knowledge-birth
Of LEO's reign, rest in unconscious sleep ;
And if at times the laugh of midnight mirth
Is heard along Rome's vaulted ways to sweep—
As dance and song their festal riot keep—
It soon dies muffled in the drowsy still ;
And if through casement here and there may peep
The sick man's lamp—you know not of the ill—
Night nods the city dumb as with a tyrant's will.

XXIII.

Yet Rome holds one who peoples the bald hour
With coward murder's family of fears.
VOLPO, shut in the chamber of a tower—
Its shadow painted in the mountain's tears
Now swelling sulky Tiber, as it bears
Slowly afar a muddy winding vein—
There pausing, listening with sound-haunted ears,
He shuts his eyes ; but visions still remain—
Thought mothers thought apace, though each is born in pain.

XXIV.

With measured step he paces to and fro,
Now slow, now hurried, as his wand'ring will
Is free or tangled in a mazy throe.
Again that troubled mind grows calm and still,
Like winds that wait for music's charm to fill.
About some visionary form he sighs ;
Then empty disappointment seems to kill
The quiet charm—his hand with quick grasp flies
Where a bright poniard in the moonbeam flashing lies.

XXV.

“ But little boots it how or when we die—
'Tis but the difference of a pulse in time,
A question asked and answered in the why !
If I should make a soul more quickly climb—
Kill a strong manhood in its early prime,
I murder but a heritage of woe. . . .
We falsely christen much the world calls crime ;
To question—doubt—believe : from such must grow
All we name right and wrong—all that we think we know.”

XXVI.

Still back to earth th' immediate danger calls—
Something of judgment is reserved for man—
Back on the ugly dream again he falls,
And labours how to screen his murd'rous plan.
The secret must be shut from human scan !
Stretched caution works her scheme. He thinks he reads
Whate'er from circumstance may grow, and can
Prepare a foil ; but fancy's womb still breeds,
Fresh shadows people space, whene'er a doubt recedes.

XXVII.

Now hark ! the iron tongue of booming bell
Rolls its round melody along the air !
'T is midnight chime—on VOLPO's ear it fell
Like voice that bids his halting hand prepare.
“ It must be so ! ” He treads the marble stair,
And stealthily creeps on by leafy screen,
Clasping a dagger, till his fingers wear
A bloodless hue—his lip is pressed between
His rigid teeth.—Time will not pass and close the scene !

XXVIII.

With joy, youth's ecstasy, oft lashed to tears,
Had LEONILDA watched from closing day.
Loud beats her heart—the appointed moment nears
When OSCARO must bear his love away.
Her eyes would upward turn, as she would pray
Such prayers as climb to heaven without speech.
A life-dream in such swooning gladness lay—
She felt that joy which some rare moments teach,
When all we 've asked for, hoped for, seems within our reach.

XXIX.

Alas ! that painted visions of the mind
Should die in a material bodiment.—
Fond expectation, will it never find,
Yet ceaseless seek, that which it deems content ?
The busy brain, o'er its world-mirror bent,
In one charm'd, meditative hour, can dream
More beauty into being than is sent
To bless a life. Anear our joys oft seem
Too like a sorrow lit by some celestial beam.

XXX.

A silken shawl, wròught by the dusky hands
Of Moorish maids, her gentle figure wound,
Whilst at a casement's lofty arch she stands,
Love-trembling at the faintest footfall's sound.
Flowing and free, her hair luxuriant found
Itself couched round her bosom, and there tied
The silver moonbeams, gem-like, flashing round
A tenderness of features that allied
You to the mind which their discoursing beauty sighed.

XXXI.

She loved, as virgins' hearts can love, before
The world has swept the bloom of youthfulness—
She loved, as virgin hearts can love, when more—
That fatal more, but teaches to love less!
One grief she sorely wept—one sad excess
O'er which thought madly rushed in rapid flow :
She asked in vain a father's voice to bless !
Still, like a cataract, from whence below
The Iris leaps, love arched her tumult with its bow.

XXXII.

Now stands her mother weeping by her side,
And tries to bid her cherished joy adieu—
“Farewell, my fond one ; may'st thou be the bride
Alike of fortune and content. I knew
Something of both ; although so brief—so few
My days of bliss, they were enough to prove
A woman's heart. Be to thine own self true,
(No better guardian for a husband's love) ;
And when you pray the interceding saints above

XXXIII.

“To will misfortune from this life below,
Forget not thy lost father. If again
Thou chance shouldst meet him in this vale of woe,
When I am dead, tell him the wearying pain
I felt from absence, was the long, long reign
Of Hope, become dead statue on its throne.
Now, 't is the hour—you may not here remain—
Farewell! Farewell! How hard, my child, to own
This parting leaves me in an unkind world alone!”

XXXIV.

Long each had wept upon each other's breast,
Piteously sad; and many a broken word
Was sobbed from lips that met again and pressed
Convulsively; and vows were made unheard,
Whilst tears flowed fast and warm—wishes deferred
Peopled the future—yet with unbelief!
Thus fondest feelings into being stirr'd,
As might the interlaced and sistered leaf
In tempest's breath.—Oh! 't was an o'er-wrought grief!

XXXV.

So, with a lengthened, lingering embrace,
They part; and LEONILDA quickly threads
A moonlit pathway to the trysting-place.
Soft summer's breath a magic influence sheds
On all around, and many a fond plant spreads
Its arms, half wakeful in the warm air's sigh,
And dreams it day. Anon, her quick ear weds
The splashing oars.—“'T is he! 'T is he!—so nigh!”
And lighter speeds she on, like winged ecstasy.

XXXVI.

By winding way of long, unbroken shade,
Formed with thick clustering trees, and where the moon
Beamed broad and full—and where a fountain played,
With tiny splash, its constant, babbling tune—
Where statue watched, so pale in midnight's noon,
You thought how marble on the moonlight fed.
And where the path with herbal life was strewn—
And where, worn smooth by human footsteps' tread,
The light and fairy feet of LEONILDA sped.

XXXVII.

The garden's verge she reached—she pass'd the tow'r
Which VOLPO left, when creeping to a stair
Washed by the Tiber's waves. The charméd hour
Silver'd with shiv'ring light—but here and there—
The stream that mutter'd like a crowd at prayer.
Such spot would lovers choose their love to bless—
Cypress and laurel, with armed aloes, were
Among the bow'rs to which the waters press—
A varied garden scene of leafy dark excess.

XXXVIII.

Quick rushing to and fro with restless speed,
Fond LEONILDA seeks her OSCARO.
But vain her search! No fear could e'er exceed
That she now owns; and she begins to grow
Cold, pulseless, mad with doubt, and wildly throw
Her voice into the air. Scanning the tide,
She sees an empty bark borne forward, slow—
The toy of wanton waters, that defied
The onward rolling stream as they their eddies tied.

XXXIX.

List ! list ! It is the voice she seeks to meet,
 But paining silence with its mournful sound.
 O fatal hour ! What is she doom'd to greet ?
 Her OSCARO—pale, bleeding on the ground !
 One awful sigh, as if a soul had found
 Itself in hell ! Her trembling fingers traced
 Where warm blood bubbled through a deadly wound ;
 She bound him with her shawl, in fluttering haste ;
 Then on her bended knee his head was softly placed.

XL.

“ I ’m dying, love—I feel the fatal chill
 Of halting blood—my brain grows dark within—
 Ere long, these eyes with endless night will fill.
 Oh, cruel death ! To die so soon ! Now bring
 Thy brow more near, and let my dim sight win
 Its last dear boon. VOLPO !—’t was he ! ’t was he !—
 Is the frail screen ’twixt life and death so thin ?
 From this quick gathering night methinks I see
 Where Time is melting into Immortality.

XLI.

“ To leave thee, LEONILDA, ne’er again
 To meet on earth—O ! never—never more !
 ’T is this which gives a louder pulse to pain ;
 Did man e’er die so cruel death before ?
 My love throbs hotter than the body’s sore.
 Must such love to the grave ? Sweet maid !—Dear wife !
 Think ye the soul, remembering, hangs o’er
 Its worldliness, and that the scratch of knife
 Can only kill the palpable—the clay of life ?

XLII.

“Try, tell me, dearest—tell me, may we meet
To know each other through eternity?
Shall we that question like the rest repeat,
But once again in Hope’s fond arms to die?
Great God! it must be so. Then, fond one, try
With such charged thought to rob thine hour of pain.
Now, kiss me! yet another!—let them lie
Thick on my thirsty lips! again—again!
Hold off foul death awhile.—Oh, saints! my senses wane!

XLIII.

“I’m dying fast—I see no more—sweet dove!—
This chilly leaden heart!—Most cruel fate!
Where art thou now? For blessed Mary’s love
Forgive, kind Heav’n, all crimes my life may date.
Farewell. Oh! fare thee well! I’m at the gate—
Eternity is near!” She, weeping, prayed;
Grief-stifled was her speech, and all too late
To save, those prayers, which from far Hades’ shade
Had warr’d their way on high, and supplication made.

XLIV.

And cold, and pale, and paralyzed, as one
Whom lightning’s noiseless stroke might single out—
Leaving, as ’t were, the will of death half done,
She knelt beside him, happily in doubt—
The truth within, made dark the truth without.
It was a melancholy sight to see
Her hands, like some poor idiot’s, play about
The chilly corse, as oft with ecstasy
She pressed his brow, and called his name most piteously.

XLV.

Now faithful reason rudders once again,
Responding to the charts of mind. She stands
With eyes upturn'd to heav'n, whilst her mute pain
Wakes into fearful tumult, and demands
A retributive hour. Her clasped, white hands,
High stretched, halt o'er the sadness of her brow ;
Her pale lip trembles as the thought commands ;
Her rigid attitude proclaims a vow
Of vengeance, panting for the when—the where—the how.

XLVI.

She gathered roses whilst the morning dew—
Anxious as gems that never met the sun—
Lay waiting on the earth : these flowers she threw
Thick o'er the body. When such task was done,
She sought a stem, with which she soon begun
To make a cross—then on the lifeless breast
'T was fondly placed—then once again she flung
Her arms about her OSCARO, and press'd
Lips cold and voiceless as a bird's abandoned nest.

XLVII.

The stars had waned, a dawning blush had thrown
In light and shade the clust'ring capital.
At length the sun reigned light in heav'n, alone.
Many a globy dome flashed brightly, all
Rich with coloured tiles—from thence the call
Of matin bells challenged the city round.
Soon woke the multitude—a busy brawl
Roll'd wave-like through the streets with mingling sound,
Yet paused in awe where Rome's proud ruins tomb'd the ground.

XLVIII.

Then LEONILDA, armed with fixed intent,
 Her mother's chamber sought, and quickly told
 What bloody deed the midnight hour had sent ;
 But as her words the awful tale unfold
 Her voice grows firm—heroically bold.
 Treading the lofty chamber to and fro,
 Her eyes dilated flashed a light so cold,
 As though a mind from its own tomb could throw
 A life you wished to live and yet you feared to know.

XLIX.

“I cannot be to thee as daughter more !
 Oh, mother ! mother ! who can give me aid ?
 My nature is unhinged, its cunning store,
 Linked with such wondrous harmony, and made
 To play divinest song—deceived—betrayed !
 All out of tune ! I feel life's hopes expire !
 Their ashes are revenge ! Blest MARY, maid !
 My bosom's big with burning Vengeance's fire—
 My soul could plead to Heav'n with such unholy ire.”

L.

All that a mother's love could now devise
 The daughter's o'er-wrought passion would erase ;
 Speech melted on her ear like snow that tries
 To write its being on the water's face.
 Yet there are moments memory would retrace
 How OSCARO had loved ! 'T was then she grew
 Still as a shadow in a sunny place ;
 The joy lived round her, but it only threw
 Its glory on a blank, and with the chance-gleam flew.

LI.

And then she would resume :—" Whate'er strange tale
Shall come with blood upon its wordy brow,
To fright thee in the future, do not pale
On hearing such grew from my vengeance-vow
'Gainst him—accursed VOLPO. Even now
Methinks I see him servile to my will,
Feasting on smiles whose hidden edge shall plough
A longing appetite ; then he shall fill
My hand with weapons that can torture and then kill."

LII.

" Strange words, my child—what would'st thou say ?
How humble one whom all the city knows
So powerful to good or ill ?" " The way
Is simple, mother : each reflection grows
Material fact ; and now my whole scheme flows
To ripening fulness. Lady ! thou should'st learn
There is a cunning priest, who often shows
Himself, with mystic words, as he would turn
VOLPO's fool's love to some mysterious ends, and earn

LIII.

" A secret but withal a waiting scheme
This old man plots to gain the Papal throne.
Once robed with pow'r, deeds which at present seem,
And are, a group of treason, will have grown
The vassals of a king, and statued own
Themselves to laws of dire necessity.
The struggles of his day are not alone
The cause why some men say LEO should be
More like a Pope of Rome—less like Rome's heresy !

LIV.

“But more of this when I can better speak.
My mother dear! how sick, how sad I feel!
My eyesight’s growing dim—my limbs so weak!
Oh! lead me to the chapel—let me kneel
While yet I’ve power to pray.” Slowly they steal—
The daughter leaning on the mother’s breast—
To where they oft had whispered an appeal;
And where again the world-clad heart undressed,
And showed its wounds to Heav’n, and Heav’n saw and blessed.

LV.

The chamber was illumed with pleasing light,
That sparkled through a gorgeous painted pane,
And fell on floor of marble, black and white—
On arch that clasp’d an altar, and again
Around the chamber, where, with winding vein,
Were wreathing arabesques of quaint design,
Whose spandrils prisoned saints on gaudy stain;
Or framed conceits, whose ornaments entwine
In bands of traceries, that, dividing, yet combine.³

LVI.

Above the altar, and in solemn shade,
But dimly seen, a fair Madonna gazed
A loveliness into your mind, and made
Religion of the slumbering thoughts she raised;
And ’neath this holy painting, crystal-vased,
A sickly lamp burnt on perpetually.
Here LEONILDA, mournful, kneeling, placed
Her arms athwart her breast, as it might be,
That Heav’n had made divine a human misery.

LVII.

Long at this shrine she breathed intensest prayer,
With upturned eyes that held the halting tear,
And claspéd hands, and rebel thoughts that dare
Before the golden gates of heav'n appear,
And in Religion's madness, without fear,
Ask Heav'n to bless the crime her vengeance plann'd.
At length the mute Madonna grew more dear,
And smiled approval to each dark demand—
The guilt that could not live with living breath was fann'd. ⁴

NOTES TO PART II.

NOTE 1, STANZA VI., PAGE 21.

*And sistered thought in sistered minds renew
On Time's broad battle-field the struggle for the TRUE!*

The history of most men who have sought to elevate humanity presents a melancholy picture of the leaning of the accidental governing few towards falsehood in politics as well as in religion and science. The dungeon or the gallows, in olden times at least, too frequently ended the life of men who stood forth to denounce corruption in high places. For telling the truth Socrates was poisoned; Mahomet was hunted like a wild beast for preaching the one true God; Rienzi was eventually murdered by the people he had emancipated; Savonarola was burnt for telling the Roman Church she had forgotten Christ; Galileo was thrown into the Inquisition because he had discovered new wonders of the Almighty. Examples might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. Truth tellers in religion, politics, or science, in all ages have suffered, and suffer still; but it is gratifying to observe, that what is high treason in one man's life may become law before the death of his son, and that which is unbelief to-day may become the altar of a religion to-morrow. These observations are not intended to justify the vulgar rant of those who denounce to ignorant mobs the existing law or religion of the day, but refer to those immortal men who created revolutions that shaped a new age.

NOTE 2, STANZA XI., PAGE 22.

— *And slowly grow
The symbol of the Word the Saviour spoke.*

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."—*Matthew*, chap. v., 48.

NOTE 3, STANZA LV., PAGE 37.

*Or framed conceits, whose ornaments entwine
In bands of traceries, that, dividing, yet combine.*

The arabesque decorations here referred to are those revived by Raffaello from the frescoes of the Baths in Rome. What use was made of them at the period of this poem may be seen in the Vatican. Giulio Romano worked

with singular skill this pleasing and fanciful art, examples of which are still existing in the Villa Madama, near Rome. Many a faded roof and wall may be found thus decorated; and even at the present day a few wealthy Italians paint their palaces in this style. The discovery of Pompeii opened a new storehouse of mural decorations well worthy of study.

NOTE 4, STANZA LVII., PAGE 38.

*At length the mute Madonna grew more dear,
And smiled approval to each dark demand—
The guilt that could not live with living breath was fann'd.*

It is no uncommon circumstance to find the Roman Catholics of Italy praying to a Madonna or a saint even for the destruction of an enemy; and very frequently the excited imagination of the devotee pictures approval, believing the image has blessed their proposed sin. The poor people when supplicating under such an error very often cause a candle to burn upside down.

PART III.

I.

AVE MARIA ! it is a blessed time !
The whisp'ring thousands breathe one mingling prayer ;
Bareheaded, kneeling, wrapt in the sublime,
As Heav'n had snatched from earth the curse we bear—
For one brief moment bid mankind to wear
The jewel of their soul's divinity,
And king their passions till all worldly care
Halts like a pendulum which cannot ply
Its everlasting toil when God is standing by.

II.

AVE MARIA ! the clang of ev'ning bell
Proclaims another golden day is dead ;
One little pause, and each again must spell
The world's unkindness, or the joys they wed,
Oft to be stifled in a marriage bed.
No rest for poor humanity ! Again
The halting crowd with varied aim is spread ;
Some seek for pleasure—all encounter pain ;
And one must to the grave whom murder's knife hath slain.

III.

'T was a dark, narrow street of ancient Rome,
Composed with lofty palaces of stone,
Where carven 'scutcheons told each owner's home—
The proud man's pride in history's twilight shown.
Green weeds between the massive blocks had grown ;
Some windows closed, as though by doomsday-hand ;
Some portals shut, whose span was boldly thrown
High up into the structure, that did stand
Defying time with frowns—broad, ponderously grand.

IV.

Here with a solemn movement, sad and slow,
The crowd beheld a winding train advance.
'T was a procession'd fun'ral, with a show
Of lengthened line of torches bright, that dance
In shadow'd gloom, and but that gloom enhance ;
Like bright fire-flies, which in the summer's air
Hang their illumined bodies, and romance
A star-gemm'd sky. Anon the growing glare
Reveals such obsequies as pride loves to prepare.

V.

The SAVIOUR crucified upon the cross—
A silver image flashing in the light—
Came far avant the pale and youthful corse
Of OSCARO, which robed in satin bright,
All thickly flower'd o'er, and gathered tight
About the body, belted with a sword—
The badge of gentle blood—thus free to sight,
Upon a bier of velvet, richly stored
With ornament, he lay—still as a spoken word.

VI.

Then followed weary chanters robed in white,
Each bearing lighted torch, playing the part
Of ghostly guest whose banquet hour is night—
Waking cold shiver in the city's heart.
Mute gazed the crowd, as each, uncovered, chart
Their bosoms with a cross. Tears fell from some ;
And some called on the body to impart
The murd'rer's name, until the wondering dumb,
Who knew not what it meant, join'd in the mingling hum.

VII.

At length they halt before a church, and find
The doorway hung with broad black drapery ;
And black within the marble columns twin'd.
Above those capitols winged angels tie
A circled roofing, painted gorgeously,
And laced with cornices of massive gold.
There jealous windows show at noon the sky
'Twixt intersecting masses that unfold,
And ask the day to light some sacred myth of old.

VIII.

Scattered about were altars for belief—
The image rich with toys which riches buy,
That conscience may become its self-made thief,
And lend to self its worldly vanity.
Dark oaken sanctuaries were also nigh,
For kneeling sin to tell a blushing tale,
And seek for consolation in the sigh
Of shriving priests, who carry on the sale
Of God's eternal love with those who halt and fail.

IX.

In eastern wing there stood a lofty shrine,
A Gothic structure curiously wrought—
Such art as Christian dreams most love to twine.
The clust'ring sister'd columns there support
A roofing of the poet-mason's thought—
One mighty arch it was, of busy stone,
Rich with conceits that wand'ring brought
Themselves to centring roof, from whence alone
Fell one light carven drop, as if it there had grown.

X.

The shrine was stored with strange designs, that spread
In monster forms, profusely multiplied,
As stone had dreamed itself to what it said.
Beneath the canopy slept side by side
The effigies of knights—those who had died
Of OSCAR's proud Norman race. Below
Heraldic panels were with trefoils tied,
Whilst at the base long, dusty tablets show
Such tributes to the dead as pride and love bestow.

XI.

This cunning work of art was lit about
With silver lamps, that hover'd in the air
Creating sickly smoke, which hung in doubt
Upon the net-like stone. And here and there
A flutt'ring flame threw out unearthly glare,
All green and cold; and here and there the light
Pricked out obtrusive mass, or tried to tear
A rugged ray of glimmer in that night
That hung about the shrine and reigned in gloomy right.

XII.

Some monks, assisted by a whisp'ring crowd,
Within the tomb now placed the helpless corse,
Wrapping the body in a snow-white shroud.
Then gay-clad priests, with voices loud and hoarse,
Muttered the prayers of death ; then a brief pause,
When, like a tempest wind expiring,
The reedy note sustained of organ awes
With melody, whose magic power can bring
Such feeling to the mind as soon becomes its wing.

XIII.

Long, as if Silence would not be its grave,
The music wandered in the vaulted pile ;
And when such wordless language seeming gave
A farewell sigh, 't would break into a smile
Of such delicious rapture, for awhile
You thought how grief might sleep—then wake in heav'n.
Anon more solemn strains came to revile
Harmonious ecstasy. Thus twined, yet riven,
The melody dreamed on, as if by angels given.

XIV.

Darkness had made black nothing of the church ;
'Twas midnight past ; the living group had fled ;
And the sad sighing winds of midnight search
As they would find a tomb amongst the dead.
Two beings, bearing tapers, slowly sped
Along the time-worn marbles of the floor ;
Faint echoes marked their footfalls' prating tread,
Guided by sickly lamp, which each one bore,
As darkness skulk'd to corners darker than before.

XV.

Beside the open tomb the lamps they place ;
And one, the elder, trembling gazed below—
The other watched apart with cunning face,
Cloaked like a Capuchin. “ There is a show
Of speech about yon brow, which seems to glow
Enough with eloquence to beckon breath
Back to the silent corse, did we not know
The mind still speaks, and yet it nothing saith,
As though a living sun should light a world all death.”

XVI.

’T was then the elder in excitement drew
A dagger from his belt, and wildly flung
Himself into the tomb to stab anew ;
But he whose arm was vigorously young,
Balked the intent, and soothingly begun
To reason thus :—“ VOLPO, I came not here
But to dispel with eyesight doubts that wrung
Thy mind with infidelity and fear :
What wouldst thou more of death so piteously clear ?”

XVII.

“ Back to its home dost thou but wisely call
My better self. Alas ! I am too weak :
My beaten nature, conquered, seems to fall
Prostrate behind the treasure I would seek.
Hast heard who die upon ambition’s peak ?
Would I had never struggled for that height !
There is no sabbath for my toiling week ;
I cannot find repose ; my hopes will fight.
I dread the coming morn, yet hate the haunted night.”

XVIII.

“VOLPO, for thee the triple crown of Rome
Awaits! Fortune grows wealthy for the brave,
Affording daring minds a fitting home.
A wrecked life catches even at the wave,
Whose clasp destroys, Think, then, how thou canst save,
With jewelled hands! Now, listen: I have read
Proud LEONILDA's mind—I know her to crave
For worldly pow'r. I've watched her nature's seed,
And bid her most for such tell o'er the blessed bead.

XIX.

“Thus forged the golden key, in future's left
The dear unlocking of affections slow,
And with a care enriching every theft.”
“A gentle office, friend; yet thou should'st know
Her wounds will everlasting pain bestow.
Some hearts can chain a love they could not free;
Some graves into a home for life will grow—
What mind can shut its gates on memory?
Closed eyes see most when shut 'gainst that they fear to see.”

XX.

“When next I shall confess her, I will ply
A double edged and cunning questioning—
Bid her debate herself more narrowly.
This death has left that inward living sting
Which oft diseases nature, and will bring
Another growth of thinking to a mind.
'Tis thine to cull such fruits. Come, let us fling
Afar our fears! The present, ever blind,
Knows not the good that may be with to-morrow twined.”

XXI.

Thus each discoursing reached the open air.
The early shiv'ring wind of coming morn
Swept welcome o'er the brow of heated care ;
The light of day in heaven was newly born ;
Broad purple clouds with molten gold were torn,
Assuming island forms in sea of sun.
But darkness reigned below : the herald dawn
Had conquered the chaste stars, but not begun
To battle with the gloom which night on earth had won.

XXII.

How fares it now with her who loved so well ?
Tread softly ! for we 're in her chamber, where
A couch with drapery 's screened, and seems to tell
Some suff'ring soul insensible lies there.
Thick Persian carpets clothe the floor and stair ;
The casements are close shut, and prying noon
Stabs through the darkness, with bright shafts that wear
A silver-atom'd life. How deep the swoon !
She sleeps as still and pale as cloud beneath the moon.

XXIII.

There, by the side of LEONILDA, sate
Her mourning Mother watching anxiously,
With hope each passing moment might relate
A waking life. Oft would she bend to see
If moved those lips, and then all tenderly
Bathe her pale brow, which dreamingly betrayed
The what we are through what we seem to be—
That bony frame on which proud beauty 's made,
Showed how round roseate youth in one brief month could fade.

XXIV.

Days pass'd before she woke to consciousness ;
And when perception came, she trembling said :—
“ But are we still on earth ? dear mother press
My lips.” Then raising from the couch her head,
She gazed around the room as from the dead
Rose up ; and questioned self, until her brain
Woke like a thirsty lamp that's newly fed.
She bade her mother near the bed remain,
Whilst she betray'd with words the path her dream had ta'en.

XXV.

“ I dreamed I sought my OSCARO beloved,
With such belief as we are taught can find
The dead. Descending a dread steep, I moved
About a circling abyss, made blind
With night like that which fills a dying mind.
The very gloom made pictures in the air.
Such mass of sleeping stone as ages bind,
Hád gaped itself to caverns everywhere,
Guarded by giant forms whose jaws were hung with care.

XXVI.

“ Here in this stony wilderness, I found
Pathways made smooth by wand'ring human feet—
The fleshy tread had worn the sharp rock round.
’T was centuries of pain that paved such street.
Awestruck I sate me down in dark retreat—
I heard the voices of a multitude,
Like dying thunder in the caverns meet—
A tide of toiling, tempest sound, renewed
By mocking echoes that asked agony for food.

XXVII.

“ And while I gazed, a gray, cold leaden light
Dawned on the desolation of the scene ;
Yet all was shadowless. My wand’ring sight
Could find no human form on which to lean,
Though crowds were passing by me, all unseen,
A tide of human minds, that tried again
To find embodiment, for each had been
Born on this earth. I heard those souls complain
How they were doomed to feed on self-creating pain.

XXVIII.

“ I called to OSCARO—I wept—I prayed,
I traced his form in empty air, and threw
My arms about the phantom I had made,
Although its mocking nothingness I knew.
The ready answer from the question grew,
My soul was warm with kisses, and my frame
Trembled with o’erwrought joy, until the dew
Upon my burning brow in mercy came—
I felt a wondrous change, I find no words to name.

XXIX.

“ A plundering infidelity ere long
Robbed all this wealth of fancied happiness.
Methought the new world’s GENIUS came to throng
My mind with rebel thoughts ; anon, the dress
Belief had worn, displayed its rottenness ;
Old knowledge—all I ’d learnt in former state,
Asked to know more, or laboured to learn less.
My thoughts could nought but questioning self relate—
The Terrible alone some minds are doomed to date.

XXX.

“ ‘ All men,’ the GENIUS spoke, ‘ in every clime,
Have tried to make a far-off heaven, and pave
Eternity with our poor dream of time.
The broad, black emptiness beyond the grave,
Has formed the disc where bigot, fool, and knave,
Have painted phantoms for the crowd to read.
Men hunger for deceit, and ever crave
Imposture’s aid. Their coward hour of need
Asks for a feast of lies, and bids mankind to feed.’¹

XXXI.

“ ‘ Yet let me teach you blessed is belief,
For all our knowledge is to think we know.
A new creed only comes to our relief
When we have fought and laid the old one low—
When wrestling reason gives the fatal blow.
I sought thee when this limbo had become
To thee a Poet’s song—its scheme of woe
A wordy prattle, yet to faith’s ear dumb—
Kneel to your new belief, and soon new prayer will come.’ ”

XXXII.

Oft LEONILDA’s mind such dreams would wear
Whilst youth was asking health back to her frame.
How grateful then each morning draught of air,
Which like new life to her young bosom came,
And swell’d with sighs which heavingly proclaim
Themselves in draughts of drawn-in joy. Ere long
Her pulse no longer limped, as life were lame ;
Dear once again the world she lived upon—
Disease had slipt away like noiseless ghost that ’s gone.

XXXIII.

And beautiful it was, from day to day
To watch how faithful nature worked her task.
The dawning roundness of her limbs—the play
Of smiles which 'bout her chiselled lips would bask—
Dark screening lashes, so long wont to mask,
Revealed bright eyes that dared the light to seek.
Each day from its to-morrow seemed to ask
More beauty-charms ; as rose, when pale and meek,
Asks for the coming hours to paint her pallid cheek.

NOTE TO PART III.



STANZA XXX., PAGE 51.

*Men hunger for deceit, and ever crave
Imposture's aid. Their coward hour of need
Asks for a feast of lies, and bids mankind to feed.*

Socrates has told us this in his cave scene, one of the most wonderful passages of Plato. Coleridge may have thought of the Greek when he wrote:—

“ — And we in this low world
Placed with our backs to bright reality,
That we may learn with young unwonted ken
The substance from the shadow.”

PART IV.

I.

'T WAS autumn ; and a summer's festival
Of sunlight, from the stores of generous earth,
Had drained that cup which fill'd at Nature's call.
Gold-mantled trees drooped over dusty dearth ;
No herbal beauty blest the land with birth—
A thirsty asking hung about the scene ;
The stream that played its gurgling song of mirth,
With pebbled path but showed what it had been—
The broad, hot landscape sparkled with a sandy sheen.

II.

At length the waters gathered in the sky—
Black masses, marched from out the cloudy west,
Opened anon by lurid lightning's eye,
With lungs of thunder shook the eagle's nest.
The wind, like trouble locked in human breast,
Betrayed itself with sighs, whilst the big tear
Of tempest plashed in dust, and dead leaves dress'd
In sympathy the earth. A conscious fear
Quivered in leaden air, and told the storm was near.

III.

Soon came the drenching deluge from the cloud,
 A roaring cataract of angry rain,
 Which deadened thunder with its liquid shroud.
 The insect world had all crept home again
 With closed wings, that clasped their tiny pain.
 Anon you heard with measured step retreat
 The battling elements—then the blue vein
 Blest once more heav'n's brow ; and, freshly sweet,
 The wind with sunbeams played, as when two children meet.

IV.

Such seasons quickly pass'd ; it was the time
 Before the snow makes bold the mountain's face—
 The second summer of Italia's clime.
 Then painted floor would LEONILDA pace
 With casements open, so the sun might lace
 That gaudy chamber with the light of day.
 Where statued Psyche's soul-inspired grace
 Smiled as 't would give its heav'n-born self away—
 Though marble locked the loved that ceaseless sought to stay.

V.

Upon a table, tazza-shaped, was placed
 A silver salver flashing in the light,
 And circling fruits, with lip elaborate chased :
 Green bloom-proud grapes, so cooling to the sight,
 With the rich purple of long plums unite,—
 The fleshy peach with hectic cheek was there ;
 And figs as black as they had grown in night ;
 And full pomegranates, split by ripening air,
 Scattered their ruby gems about the silv'ry glare.

VI.

Books in rare bindings lay about the floor,
And one was open, showing painted page
Of laboured miniatures : how rich the store
Of gaudy colours in a golden cage
Of curious scrolling, which some monkish sage
In convent home had wrought to charm his days.
Loved travail of a past refining age !
Dear ART ! which ever woos, and ne'er betrays—
Who knows and feels thy charm oft halts, and, kneeling, prays.

VII.

Within the chamber on a crimson seat
Sad LEONILDA sate ;—her trembling hand
Had dropped a crowded letter at her feet.
On such she fixed her gaze, the while she plann'd
How best to satisfy her life's demand.
Not yet Revenge a faultless scheme had taught ! . . .
When mid-day struck, she saw before her stand
Whom long she shunn'd, whom oft of late she sought—
VOLPO was there ! and thus his measured speech was wrought:—

VIII.

“ Sweet charge ! I would have come before to add
Another voice of comfort for thy woe,
But that the heart with o'er-wrought sorrow clad
Loves solitude.” Then met their eyes, as though
Each sought with stabbing-question's aim to know
That which the other held in pausing gaze.
Oh ! 't was a trying moment, and the flow
Of living blood froze in its wondrous maze—
Each mind walked dumbly round the thoughts it feared to raise.

IX.

At length the CARDINAL, more bold, with voice
 Of soft persuasion thus began :—
 “ He merited right well thy loving choice,
 For he was all in all as perfect man
 As Nature makes when she completes her plan—
 A mind well balanced, quick in mental sight,
 Yet slow to judge. Bold in the marching van
 Of battling thought, he captained, and would fight
 Till he oft made broad day of others’ doubtful night.

X.

“ In converse he the scholar’s charm possessed,
 Who made dead history wear life’s charm again ;
 And when his choice perception chanced to rest,
 In a rare, dreamy, yet illumined vein,
 On Art or Poësy, each seem’d to gain—
 For he could teach you how to look and know ;
 And when more vigorous flights his thoughts had ta’en,
 He struck creation’s anvil, till it threw
 About such stars as grace a mind’s divinest blue.”

XI.

Anxious to change such speech, the Roman maid—
 As picture should be given the power to break
 Its painted pause—upraised her brow, arrayed
 With prating pride—so proud, it seem’d to shake
 Away in scorn the smile itself would make,
 Like a false jewel’ry too poor to wear :—
 “ VOLPO, my grief’s so dear, none shall partake
 E’en of its shadow ; but all else we share.
 Now coin my life anew—write the new image there !”

XII.

"I think I gather from your written word,
And from the CAPUCHIN's discourse, as 't were
A wish by thee expressed, though long deferred,
That we should hold debate. Let us beware
Of listening ears!"—(She closed the doorway)—"There!
Let caution break her seals, nor bid me more
Put on a mask 't were idle now to wear.
I like the hint your letter holds—before,
My life was empty as a dead shell of the shore."

XIII.

"Search well yourself before you trust to speech;
Bring all your actors well before my view,
And let me learn the hidden play of each.
You see, though much to learn, I something knew
Of plans which in the night of Treason grew.
I must learn all—be confident—be bold—
Call murder by its name! . . . Ah! then 't is true!—
Some thoughts that cannot die methinks grow cold,
And, pallid, prate without what oft within they've told."

XIV.

"I see decision in your speech's form.
We want such element—that conqu'ring will
Which so sublimes your nature's fit to storm
The citadel of hidden plans that fill
My brain." "Speak, VOLPO, speak! lest fear should kill
The infant faith you say my words command."
"Then listen to my tale—come good, come ill,
Time and the circumstance go hand in hand,
And Faith's an empty lie if Faith fear to be scann'd."

XV.

“ Know, then, I must ere long be Pope of Rome—
 The stars have writ it on their azure page—
 The fruit must with its proper season come.
 One cunning in those stars would thus presage
 My destiny :—*When the sixth ten’s your age,*
If thou canst gain a certain woman’s heart,
And the ambition of her soul engage
In a joint peril, then the starry chart
Gives all the Church of Rome can to her king impart.

XVI.

“ And since this prophecy, a viewless hand
 Has built throne-circling steps we both should tread
 With wedded aim. Hear how the play is plann’d.
 Yet when I’ve spoke it, would my words were dead,
 As unremembered dreams that die in bed.
 Treason should be as noiseless as the snow—
 Wearing a white-faced purity ; when fled,
 Of the same nature—nothing left to know
 Its mother cause, or why it was, or whence did flow.

XVII.

“ One Cardinal PETRUCCI, LEO late
 Did banish from Sienna in disgrace.¹
 This man, the first to seal the Pontiff’s fate,
 Is but the tool of others, who would place
 Myself upon the throne. Poison will chase
 Men’s veins, and hunt the life out of the frame.
 So many Popes have died. Do you not trace
 The prophecy ? Yet what its end ? what aim
 Unless thou queen my kingdom, as the stars proclaim ?”

XVIII.

“ Let me hear more !” “ Ay, all !—thou canst not learn
 Too much and knowing what I now have told.
 The plot ’s so wide, no Cardinal can turn
 His eyes to heav’n, and to that heav’n unfold.
 And yet they ’ll hug a crime, like stolen gold,
 Too poor to buy the conscience a night’s rest.
 Though such are built of proud ambition’s mould,
 They yet are nature’s blunders—lame men dress’d
 In strength. A bird, though fledged, oft fears to leave its nest.

XIX.

“ The Cardinal St. GEORGIO—he ’s too rich
 To be suspected of a crime ; and they
 Old SORDIRINI and FARNESE, pitch
 The high key of righteousness, and play
 Upon the world’s credulity. To say
 Such men are not what they appear to be,
 Would make an earthquake in belief, and slay
 The infidels. With such as these must we
 Play with our loaded dice the game of majesty.

XX.

“ Guilt is not guilt, if none dare give it name.
 How often conscience fears to have a tongue !
 Nor will suspicion wound the Church’s fame,
 Being remember’d by the mob when young,
 Disease about this MEDICI was hung,
 Rotting his splendour and his pride with pain.
 Kings are forgotten soon ; their course once run,
 The vain to-morrow greets its king again—
 Ere cold the empty crown that pressed the dead man’s brain.

XXI.

“One man I fear—a man of cunning mind—
A juggler who can shift, and turn, and hide
With skill the accidents of life—so blind
The world with speech, men often side by side
Stand duped e’en by the lies they have defied.
This ADRIAN DE CORNITO’s wit and will
To double me. Be thou his soul’s fair guide!
With him would die much contemplated ill—
Some blood will sanctify the very hands that kill.”

XXII.

“VOLPO, pause not the murder-knife to gild!
I have put out my conscience—that blest light
Whose searching flame is fed, whose lamp is filled,
From the same fountain of Eternal Light,
As that which feeds the silver lamps of night.
More dark my path—more free my foot from fear.
Nor dread my woman’s heart, whose nature might
In health come forth when least it should appear:
The woman’s dead within me—cold as frozen tear.”

XXIII.

“’Tis well! There is a Roman chemist nigh,
Full of strange fancies, gathered from his art.
He’ll tell you, with a confidential sigh,
Creation’s a big lab’ratory—each part,
From the huge mountain to the atom’s heart,
Is but the spawn of mingling element—
Self-making all we see. Such must impart,
By measured aim for which it here is sent,
Those attributes no accident could e’er invent.

XXIV.

"The fair IMPERIA gives a midnight feast,²
 The POPE will honour her—there too we'll find
 Our CARDINAL, and he, this body's priest—³
 He who absolves the body from the mind.
 Thy beauty might be used as double blind,
 If those white hands would drug the cup of each—
 CORNITO's and the POPE's! Sense left behind,
 Three days they'll linger without power of speech,
 Ere through a cloud of dreams the shores of death they reach."

XXV.

As thus he spake, he heard the rust'ling dress
 Of LEONILDA's mother on the stair.
 He rose, and, listening, found the noise grow less,
 As she descended to the open air.
 "Speak—I beseech ye speak! With all our care,
 It may be that our plans are known to three!"
 "Fear not," the maid replied; "rather beware
 Of what yourself may think you hear and see—
 Racked Caution breeds apace in its hot agony."

XXVI.

"How little, VOLPO, hoped I once to share
 Such weighty confidence! Thou—who hast nursed
 My infant years, and with a father's care
 Fashioned my mind, until it hath rehearsed
 A ruling pow'r—hast sometimes said I durst
 Do battle with the world and win applause.
 I know not if such teaching's blest or curst;
 But I can sit me on a throne, and cause
 Deeds which I would command first bend to self-made laws."

XXVII.

“ Now, VOLPO, go thy way—Enough ! farewell !
I must contract with conscience all alone—
Shut with contracting prayer the gates of hell.
This is not coward fear—nor had I shown
These warm tears on my cheek, but to atone
For a soul’s banquet, rich with gratitude—
Sometimes we cannot speak the joy we own !
Ambition crown’d with her own hands, and viewed
In Fortune’s glass ! Oh, leave me—leave me to my mood ! ”

XXVIII.

“ Yet but a word ; and though I speak in vain,
O ! use thy woman’s kindness to reply ;
Some shadow of affection would I gain,
This heart for such would give its latest sigh—
Or let me gaze upon thy frowns, and die !
Oft have I heard how gentle souls are won,
And coaxed by doting age, until they tie
Their tendrils round the stem that first begun
By guarding from the storm, and couching in the sun ! ”

XXIX.

He sought her hand to press—he would have knelt
Ere closed again the door through which he came.
Before he could approach her he had felt
A look which paralysed his trembling frame,
And turned hot passion into skulking shame.
Few words of caution—then a faint adieu—
Silent the room—yet now and then the name
Of VOLPO fell from lips that roseate grew,
As they a crucifix embraced, and spoke anew :—

XXX.

“ Then art thou with me, OSCARO ?—dear love !
The presence of thy spirit fills my mind.
Hush, beating heart !—receive thy blessed dove !
A soul may fill until it would not find !
Angelic, proud, and yet with earth how kind,
Thy looks are piercing hidden plans with light.
Oh ! give me counsel—lead me, I am blind !
My task is full of dangers, born in night—
Guide me—my peril’s great, and asks thy heaven-born sight ! ”

NOTES TO PART IV.

NOTE 1, STANZA XVII., PAGE 59.

*One Cardinal PETRUCCI, LEO late
Did banish from Sienna in disgrace.*

For the history of the conspiracy to poison LEO, see the Preface.

NOTE 2, STANZA XXIV., PAGE 62.

*The fair IMPERIA gives a midnight feast ;
The POPE will honour her.*

ROSCOE gives the following note on IMPERIA in his "Life of Leo X." :—
" Among the most distinguished of her day was the beautiful IMPERIA, so frequently celebrated in the Latin odes of Beroaldo the younger, and in the verses of Sadoleti. Of the splendour with which she received her visitors, an ample account is given by Bandello in his novels. Such was the elegance of her apartments, that when the ambassador of the Spanish monarch paid her a visit, he turned round and spat in the face of one of his servants, excusing himself by observing that it was the only place he could find fit for the purpose. *Vide* Bandello, Par. iii., Nov. 42. Her toilet was surrounded with books, both in Italian and Latin, and she also amused herself in writing poetry, in the study of which she was a disciple of Niccolò Compagno, called *Strascino*, who was probably indebted to her for the subject of one of his poems, 'Sopra il male incognito.'—*Vide* 'Life of Lor. de' Med.' She died in the year 1511, at the age of twenty-six, and was allowed to be buried in consecrated ground, in the chapel of St. Gregoria, with the following epitaph :

*Imperia, Cortisana Romana, quæ digna tanto nomine, raræ inter homines formæ
Specimen dedit. Vixit annos xxvi., dies xii.
Obiit 1511 die 15 Augusti.*

She left a daughter, who redeemed her name from disgrace by a life of unim-

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peachable modesty, and who destroyed herself by poison, to avoid the licentious attempts of the Cardinal Petrucci. *Vide Collocci, 'Poesie Ital.' p. 29. Note, Ed. Jesi, 1772."*

NOTE 3, STANZA XXIV., PAGE 62.

*There too we'll find
Our CARDINAL, and he, this body's priest.*

Vercelli, the Roman surgeon engaged in this conspiracy, is here referred to.

PART V.

I.

It was a spacious chamber where she slept,
With one broad window looking to the East,
From whence the light through crimson curtain crept,
Rose-tinting all within as day increased.
The golden gauze-shroud of a couch, released,
Fell in confusion round a snowy heap,
Whereon you traced a form which now had ceased
To press the bed, yet seemingly would keep
A blank idea of her who there had gone to sleep.

II.

Near to the centre of the room was placed
A glitt'ring toilet, fit for beauty's shrine—
A circling glass with frosted scrolling traced,
Hung o'er white marble, in a mazy twine
Of golden grape leaves, fashioned to combine
With living flowers, which rare perfumes threw
From painted lips, fresh with the kiss divine
That leaves behind a bright baptising dew—
Joy-tears, which morning's love from Nature's bosom drew.

III.

And on that marble tablet you might see,
With classic vases of Etruscan mould,
Venetian casket, chased most cunningly ;
Its art a fit inheritance for gold.
Quaint floral fancies opened broad and bold,
Building the glitt'ring section thus designed
To clasp square panels, which had never told
To careless eye half the conceits they twined
In 'wilderling excess, and yet so well defined.

IV.

Rare scented oils, and perfumes from afar,
With strange cosmetics, which belief had gained,
Strew'd the gay toilet's slab—where stood a car,
Formed of the Nautilus : the shell contained
A store of jewels flashing light, that stained
Their pearly couch, where rainbow might have died.
The chamber's floor of marble, motley veined,
Was clothed with many-spotted leopards' hide,
The clawless legs of which spread out with savage pride.

V.

And painted fancies hung upon the walls,
Arrayed in carven frames most sumptuously—
Such painting as from inspiration falls,
When cunning hands with cunning arts defy
The death a happy thought was doomed to die.
These coloured poems on the canvas rest
As summer clouds on summer ocean lie,
Making fresh pictures in the mind that 's blest
With pow'r to feel so much, and then dream out the rest.

VI.

For Art's a blundering midwife of the mind,
Which cannot give all of that mind away :
The statue leaves divinity behind ;
The painter never paints his golden day—
Or gives rare form that in conception lay ;
The Poet's thoughts ask for intenser speech ;
Music's live dreams on dead harps seem to play ;
Nor can the architect do more than preach :
Art shows how we can climb, yet climbing never reach.

VII.

Fit queen to reign o'er such a shrine of art—
IMPERIA ! that noble Roman maid !
Who taught her circling courtiers to impart
All her ambition asked—to be betrayed.
Proud of her beauty-charm, the beauty played
With lover's off'ring, like an incense curled
By capitious breath that leads it up to fade.
Where thrown her smiles, anon her frowns were hurl'd—
Ne'er married to one man, but wedded to the world.

VIII.

It was the morning time ; and from a bath
The beauty with a noiseless caution came,
Her wet feet leaving brightness in their path.
Half-robed—enough to make you guess her shame—
White drapery hung about her, and became
As 't were perceptive, screening here and there
With happy accident unknown to aim ;
But jealous hands would hide with jealous care
Whene'er the blood-warm nude its soft round charm might bare.

IX.

Her head was grand, as when the gods appear,
Commanding homage in immortal stone—
Such beauty as you worship when anear,
But only dare to love when all alone.
IMPERIA knew her pow'r, and seemed to own
Herself its strength ; her best days pass'd away
As though all feeling into pride had grown,
And would not let her woman's frailty stray—
Love wand'ring in her path, but like a child at play.

X.

With languid limbs she lay upon the bed,
And asked a book—her handmaids quickly gave.
Soon with discoursing charm her brow was fed ;
Her eyes ran to and fro : her lips' red wave
Rippled with whispered music, and would grave
Sweet dimples on her cheek, whose ripened glow
Had found that pause which beauty seeks to save ;
Her hair was black to purple, and its flow
Reached where her feet lay still and pink as morn-lit snow.

XI.

She turned the pages quick, as nothing pleased ;
And laughed aloud, as now and then she read
Some love-sick verse, and called the thoughts, " Diseased—
Fit only for some fool's mad fever bed ;"
And when her mind on graver matter fed,
Then infidelity put on its pride.
At length her gaze some favourite song has wed :
Whate'er it be, for once attention 's tied,
As her seraphic voice floats on melodious tide :—

THE CASTING OF A BRONZE HEAD OF PLATO.¹

1.

Behold him there—that huge tall man,
A Vulcan by his forge—
Lift the strong arm with measured plan,
Till from the bellows' gorge
You hear the furious, arrowy wind
Stabbing at dull, unconscious coal ;
Whilst the black mass—so dead, so blind—
Slow wakes into a glowing whole,
And, with a horrid glare,
Hangs vermeil on the air—
Painting with red reflected light
The gloomy cabin's mimic night.

2.

Pour in the crucible more brass,
More silver, and more copper—all
That, mingling, form the bronzy mass.
The metals will unite, and call
Unto the veined earth how they,
When chosen on this happy day
Old wormy Time to cheat
Of his most dainty meat,
A thing of beauty, which he loveth most
To show his pow'r upon—to be his ghost.

3.

And now the molten metals meet,
Clasping each other as in love ;
Joyous since Art's mute life shall beat
Within them soon, and bravely prove

The Sculptor's airy thought can live
In substance they alone could give.
So quick they melt,
As though they felt
They nothing were until they might enrol
The fair creation of the Artist's soul.

4.

Enough ! enough ! the Smith has made
The magic mixture of his trade.
The model waits in silence there,
Well bound, well propped, with cunning care.
And now the metals, fused in one,
At last their destined end have won—
Filling each empty space,
Homing each concaved trace,
Worked out in thought's creative strife.
How strange the process—you might say
That one should charm undying life,
It might be, from some dead man's clay !

5.

A stormy night has pass'd away,
And tearful dawns the light of day,
As Herculaneum's people wake
The stagnant pause of night to break,
With prating voice and busy feet,
Which sets a city's heart abeat,
And makes it wear in its unrest
The semblance of one human breast.

6.

The Smith is up ; and now you hear
A key grate in the cabin door.

Soon from the bronzy mass he'll tear
 The cumb'rous cast. The work is o'er :—
 Behold the HEAD OF PLATO there !
 'T is thus ambitious art
 Does in her happiest moments dare
 To wond'ring eyes impart
 The image of a brow that caught,
 As 't were from heav'n, a world of thought,
 And wing'd it with such mighty words as twine
 In one embrace the Earthly and Divine.

7.

Pause ! for the Spirit of SOCRATES
 Is here, glad that the poison cup did ease
 Him long ago
 From earthly woe.
 But never grief, or scoffer's sneer,
 Shut from the chamber of his ear,
 Or hid from his exploring way,
 A MAKER's love, which in him lay
 So full and so intense, we scarcely can
 Believe how he could live, and only be the man.

8.

His Spirit hails with mild content
 The face so full of love, so kind ;
 That looming brow that breathes with mind—
 Downcast, as with big thoughts, 't is bent.
 Ages have pass'd, and time to come must die,
 This glorious bronze eternal will remain,
 Hanging its beauty on the gazer's eye,
 Till o'erwrought wonder stretches into pain.

XII.

Thus would IMPERIA dream away the morn ;
The evening found her dressing for the feast.
Her handmaids near were waiting to adorn
With glitt'ring silks brought from the gorgeous East.
Knowing her mood, those maidens never ceased
To feed their beauty with their hired praise.
IMPERIA listened, and her pride increased—
Her vanity was tangled in that maze
Of woman's wanton joy, which none but self betrays.

XIII.

A coral wreath bound her abundant hair—
Black wavy masses brought to meet behind
In clustering ringlets, with a studied care ;
Such gave the head a majesty, and shrined
An outline grandeur eloquent of mind ;
The eye was big, and seem'd to flash its form—
The lips were with crisp drawing well defined—
The nose severely bold—the dark flesh warm,
As when the sun has kissed the cheek of darkening storm.

XIV.

Large rainbow pearls were circled round her throat,
And jewellery was about her waist ;
The robe, made with the body's form to float—
And such a form ! that when the room she paced,
The mind dreamed out the hidden nature, graced
With such a colour'd charm of gorgeous gear.
And yet the while her toilet's art you traced,
Oft feeling dimm'd the vision, like a tear
That only fills the eye to make the heart appear.

XV.

A gay crowd gathered in IMPERIA's halls,
Reached by a long and arching corridor ;
Here silver moonlight fell upon the walls,
And golden torch-glare on a roof that wore
A colour-charm. The white reflecting floor
Was of pure marble—frozen milk it seem'd—
Whereon, in double rows—up to a door
From over which a purple curtain stream'd,
Were ranged rare flow'rs, that slept and sweetest odours dream'd.

XVI.

Within were many guests, and gaily rose
The winning voice of woman everywhere ;
Fond eyes would meet, fond hearts would hug false woes,
And, 'mid the glittering crowd breed sickly care.
Some fought at politics, and others dare
Speak kingly craft, as though they knew the game ;
And scholars walked about those tombs that wear
The broken epitaphs of mortal fame,
And worship o'er the dust from whence the glory came.

XVII.

More happy they who held a fond discourse
How gentle forms in marble might be wrought,
Or how to image best heroic force ;
Whilst painters from the palette of stored thought
Woke up a coloured dream, which slowly brought
Bright pictures to the canvas of blank mind ;
And some made merry, as they mocking caught
A feature fit for satire—or, more kind,
Laughed at such merry speech as leaves a laugh behind.

XVIII.

From the broad window of the central room
A terrace stretched into a garden scene ;
Dim-coloured lamps lit up a leafy gloom
Of winding pleasant pathways, where, between
The orange and the myrtle, all unseen,
In circling embrace fond arms entwined ;
Fond hearts beat fast, and thoughts that long had been
Chafing their barr'd reserve, such language find
As makes the body wear perception like a mind.

XIX.

The sound of joyous music meets the ear ;
The banquet halls display a rustling crowd
Of flaunting dames and gallant cavaliers
Grouped round the fair IMPERIA, to whom bowed
The SOV'REIGN PONTIFF, and made Pride more proud.²
A crowd of cardinals together sate—
VOLPO was there, and seemingly would shroud
The anxious thoughts that held a hot debate,
As guilt pales like the sun at its meridian date.

XX.

Near to the POPE was LEONILDA placed,
Flashing with victory like victorious steel ;
Around, IMPERIA held discourse in haste,
And felt such joy as worldly hearts can feel.
At length you saw inquietude reveal,
With vacant stare and empty wonder fed.
The POPE rose from his seat, the guests appeal
With questioning looks and universal dread—
Speechless the PONTIFF stood, as slow his arms outspread.

XXI.

Such was the sign—the waiting guards rush in—
 With faithful Swiss the hall is quickly mann'd ;
 The doors well guarded, whilst the iron din
 Of bolts and bars show all before was plann'd.
 Again deep silence reigned—the PONTIFF scann'd
 With piercing gaze the frighten'd group around.
 Some faces pale, and on some foreheads stand
 Big drops of sweat—some eyes gazed on the ground,
 Some features in a stony, livid pause were bound.

XXII.

“ I know no greater misery than when
 The heart wakes to deception, and we read
 The saddest lessons of our life from men
 Whom we have cherished, served in pressing need ;
 Made proud with gifts and honours that should lead
 To loyalty . . . Dress up the papal throne
 With mourning black ! and let this day be freed
 From all recording trace, and you alone
 Lock in your guilty hearts the treason you have grown.

XXIII.

“ Yet have I varied duties to obey :
 The Church cries out—the world, alas ! must hear.
 Know, then, there are amongst you who would slay
 The SOVEREIGN PONTIFF. Providence is near ;
 And with that hand whose shadow will appear
 Whene'er True Faith can breed enough of light—
 I'm saved a poison cup ! Behold it here !
 Behold around whose treason would unite
 The poor rest of this joyless, limping life to smite.”

XXIV.

The PONTIFF beckoned to the waiting guard,
That circled round a few, who conscious rose.
Meanwhile a second doorway was unbarr'd,
Towards which the prisoners pass; and they were those
Whom few had deemed to be the PONTIFF's foes.
Then LEONILDA rose, and scornful said :—
“ Thus, VOLPO, I revenge my life of woes !
Go, murderer, to the dungeon gloom, and spread
Thy crimes before thy God, and wish thy body dead.”

XXV.

“ VOLPO can meet the scorn that mobs him round,”
He loud exclaimed; “ the coward's angry blade
Leaps from its scabbard when the foe is bound.
Brave men ! good knights ! I know how ye are made—
How locust-like your lies will come to aid,
And so disease guilt's native light and air,
The world will call betrayers the betrayed.
I scorn such subterfuge, and thus declare,
Crook'd fortune 's robb'd me of the crown I sought to wear!

XXVI.

“ LEO, no dungeon 's wide enough to hold
The thick rebellion that surrounds your throne.
Here I could point to creatures who have sold
Themselves to crime—ay, they who, when alone,
Or in close council met, whose brows have grown
Flushed with the maiden guilt their soul had kiss'd.
Poor lame humanity ! how oft 't is shown
The weakest have not weakness to desist—
Some fear not to beget, yet dread to see exist.

XXVII.

“ But thou ! ” he turn’d where LEONILDA sate—
“ Thou who wert sent for some mysterious aim,
To make my heart its unknown self relate,
How long ye lingered, and how late ye came
Such unexpected mission to proclaim !
The world may blame, but Heav’n alone should brand.
Yet have I done thee wrongs too great to name—
Wrongs that were measured, weighed, and, pausing, plann’d—
Oh let me wear thy pardon when I meet the damned !

XXVIII.

“ Farewell ambition, honour, wealth, and pow’r ;
Farewell to pride—all passions—hatred, scorn,
The big toys of our manhood’s crowded hour ;
Farewell to those who friendship’s bonds have torn !
Adieu to those of truer natures born !—
All I leave sorrowless. But one deep sigh,
Then to that night which cannot ask for dawn—
There ! I have looked my last ! what beggary—
The world is empty now—I feel more space to die.”

XXIX.

He gazed his last, the guards move slowly on—
“ Off to St. Angelo ! ” exclaim the guests.
“ Life to the POPE ! ” was heard to echo long
From gathering groups which round the palace press’d,
To prate the little known and guess the rest.
From lip to lip strange stories quickly flew ;
Some fled in fear—some hid themselves, the guest
Of their own conscience, as the guilty do—
And many mutely swore to shape their lives anew.

XXX.

The crowd dispersed—half stupid, still dismayed;
IMPERIA yawn'd, and hoped some future eve
A happier feast; the while she soothing pray'd
The POPE be comforted; but he would grieve—
Grief such as tries, but vainly, to deceive,
When pride will prison round a heart in pain.
Sad LEONILDA of the guests took leave,
Kissing the PONTIFF's hand, who said,—“Again,
To-morrow, we must meet—I cannot now explain.”

XXXI.

Next morn the POPE with LEONILDA sate,
Listening each circumstance till then unknown.
With beating heart he heard her then relate
How she had found loved OSCARO alone
Dead on the Tiber's bank, the murderer flown—
And he the guilty VOLPO. “Heav'n prepare
His soul,” the PONTIFF said; “he must atone
On earth. This life I owe to thee, and there
In dungeon double murder's held—his fate declare.”

XXXII.

She fell half weeping at the PONTIFF's feet,
And faltered forth her heart:—“Revenge is dead!
Before this triumph I could oft repeat
And fashion how my Vengeance might be wed.
But Victory's glory should be Mercy shed,
As 't were like halo of the conquering joy,
Let hungry law with justice-food be fed.
I've struck to earth, but care not to destroy—
Enough to trace the hand of God itself employ.”

XXXIII.

With trembling voice the POPE replied,—“To-day,
 I learn, VOLPO 's with madness cursed—withal
 A madness which at intervals, they say,
 Shows reason's pauses; then they hear him call
 For Reason's death. Thus oft a mocking pall
 He'll spread o'er thoughts that wake anon to try—
 Vainly as plants whose anchors never fall
 Beneath the waters where they floating lie—
 To find some earthly hope, their drifting wreck to tie.”

XXXIV.

“'Tis well such crime has with such justice met!
 I ask no more—I could not wish for less.
 What more for one, who 's ever doomed to wet
 Her eyes with tears that sadden but ne'er bless?
 What more for one, whose only joy 's to dress
 The tomb of buried love, with flowers grown
 'Neath the kind breath of heaven's tenderness?
 The heart is near its GOD, when we can own,
 Though the world take its all, we still are not alone.

XXXV.

“Oh! bless me, Holy PONTIFF, ere I go
 To where my waiting father doth abide
 The wide convulsion of the day to know
 How he can make my dearest mother bride,
 And bless our home—called wife by law, and tried
 With faith that welcomes marriage to the priest.
 Long have we ask'd, and Heaven 's at length replied—
 MARCO from Roman faith and law 's released,
 If joy can e'er begin, our years of grief have ceased.

F

XXXV.

“ No King of myriad conscience—one whose nod
Would teach the trembling Christian soul to feel
Its own divinity can never reach its God—
No Church commanding all but self to kneel—
That begs with craft, or buys with warrior’s steel,
The homage of mankind, will MARCO own :
Soon shall I hear my father’s lips reveal
That warring language into tempest grown—
That storm of thund’ring truth which shakes Imposture’s throne.”

XXXVI.

Long ere he spoke, the PONTIFF thought within :
“ Go where thy conscience leads thee—thou art blest ;
Bright e’en the shadow of the angel’s wing.
But there are those who never find to rest—
Who hang like babes upon a bronzy breast
Of Unbelief—from toothless infancy
To toothless age. Believe belief is best ;
For as man was, he must for ever be—
The dead leaf of the wind, though born of living tree.

XXXVII.

“ And yet ’t is beautiful to hear your speech
Discoursing music of a morning mind ;
Believing Truth may be within our reach—
Believing we have but to seek and find—
Believing man to Truth is most inclined !
Thy young faith like a giant at its birth
Smiting the mother lest she seek to bind ;
Thine honesty that dares to tongue its worth—
So much of the divine, and yet so much of earth !

XXXVIII.

"All this, dear child, has LEO felt and known.
I do remember when my life was young,
Oft when I spent my summer's eve alone,
And 'neath blue heav'n my hymn of gladness sung—
How like a heedless swimmer I have flung
Myself into an ocean of deep thought;
And questioned when the human race begun
To think it knew—how mighty minds have wrought,
Till they have formed a fancied alphabet, and taught.

XXXIX.

"How millions hung upon the dreams of one,
The stony monster of the sandy East,
Mocked by its God-made shadow and the sun;
Or glitt'ring marble of the Greek, released
From where Creation's stony chapter ceased—
Then made divine—then wrought into a lie—
So that men's souls grew stony at the feast
Of stones: meanwhile some undeceived stood by,
Who dumbly scorn'd and scoff'd, or dared to speak and die.

XL.

"I saw, too, the imposture of our age,
And felt rebellion tingle in my blood;
But Nature made me for Ambition's cage,
And fed me on Corruption's foulest food,
Until my little moiety of good
Knelt like a beaten coward at my feet.
The king had killed the man! Few have withstood
Infection when the heart must ceaseless eat
From the diseased body where 't is doomed to beat.

XLI.

“ All revolutions travel in a ring—
The people never hate Imposture's game.
Nations should make a jewel of a king—
Wear but the jewel for its kingly name.
So with a church, which must live on the same,
While fools and knaves make up the mass of men.
Defending Falsehood you may gather fame ;
Defending Truth you hide the very pen,
Which, oft-denounced of old—denounces now as then.

XLII.

“ Something of good, and yet so much of ill !
Creation's still creating to some end ;
As Time empts out, the waiting world must fill.
From age to age our knowledge shall extend ;
And as we know, O ! teach us more to bend !
We see half-lighted lamps in our dark night ;
Mind flashes the divine, but cannot send
From its imperfect self a constant light—
It only tells of pow'r to wear a MAKER'S SIGHT.

XLIII.

“ Oft I grow weary of this anxious life,
As often wish the task of life were done ;
My spirit's sore with shuffling through its strife—
Ambition weary of the wealth it's won.
When we have lived so long, that like the sun,
We've travell'd round, and seen all sides of things,
All their blank nothingness—where they begun
And how they end—the soul, still baffled, stings
Its own immortal self, and sighs to close its wings.”

XLIH.

Thus LEONILDA from the POPE withdrew.
Few days had pass'd, when, on a summer's morn,
'A bark with splashing speed was ploughing through
A summer sea, where quiv'ring light was born
Whene'er capricious winds had stopt and torn
The waveless waters with their wandering feet.
And when the crew beheld a second dawn,
Italia's shores were lost in misty heat—
The broad deep blues above dark sapphire waves repeat.

XLIV.

The Mother and the Daughter, side by side,
Gazed towards their native land in last adieu,
Half angry with the playful breeze that sighed
To swelling life the empty sails anew.
But prowards soon their fond affections flew—
Another home rose like enchantment there ;
The future into crowded gladness grew ;
Bright tears of joy lit up such happy prayer
As lives in they who 've learnt that Gon is everywhere.

NOTES TO PART V.

NOTE 1, PAGE 71.

THE CASTING OF A BRONZE HEAD OF PLATO.

This poem was suggested by the wonderful Bronze Head of Plato in the Public Neapolitan Museum of Antiquities, one of the most noble examples of Greek art found at Herculaneum. The bust in question is an idealised head, characterised by that elevation and grandeur found only in the best examples of classical art. Herculaneum had not been exhumed in the days of LEO X. Some apology therefore is necessary for the anachronism.

NOTE 2, STANZA XIX., PAGE 76.

*The banquet halls display a rustling crowd
Of flaunting dames and gallant cavaliers
Grouped round the fair IMPERIA, to whom bowed
The SOV'REIGN PONTIFF, and made Pride more proud.*

The reader must not be surprised to find the Roman Pontiff at a midnight revel. LEO X., by such indulgences, was only following the customs of his predecessors, who mixed in the world, were statesmen, patrons of learning, and sometimes, unfortunately, as in the case of ALEXANDER VI., the encouragers of voluptuous living and immorality. LEO X. was not exempt from these vices; but at the same time he was eminently calculated to lead the age in which he lived. A refined and elegant mind, a keen perception, a generous will, a sensuality always intellectual, fitted him for the society of Ariosto, Raffaello, Machiavelli, and the group of minor lights which shed their glory on his age. If his habits were not exactly what might be expected in a Pope, they were at least those of a highly intellectual man and a generous patron. He was fond of hunting by day and feasting by night. Ranke says—"The lake of Bolesna offered him the pleasures of fishing, or he would pass a certain time at his favourite residence at Milleana;

whither he was accompanied by improvisatori, and other men of light and agreeable talents, capable of making every hour pass pleasantly. Towards winter, he returned with his company to Rome, which was now in great prosperity, the number of its inhabitants having increased full one-third in a very few years. Never had the court been more animated, more graceful, more intellectual. In the matter of festivities, whether spiritual or temporal, no cost was spared ; nor was any expenditure found too lavish when the question was of amusement, theatres, presents, or marks of favour."

THE END.

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